



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 14 APR 2022

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Events, Opportunities

HEADLINE	04/14 EU: more military aid to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/04/14/Belgium-EUropean-Union-Ukraine-weapons/2711649919258/
GIST	<p>April 14 (UPI) -- The European Union has announced it will provide the Ukrainian Armed Forces with equipment and supplies worth more than \$500 million as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on democratic nations to arm it against tyranny.</p> <p>The union's European Council adopted two measures Wednesday under its European Peace Facility, an off-budget mechanism that deals with military and defense issues, to provide the Ukrainian Armed Forces with some \$544 million worth of personal protective equipment, first aid kits and fuel and lethal weapons.</p> <p>The funds increase the EU's military contribution to Ukraine to more than \$1.6 billion as Wednesday's decision follows similar ones made on Feb. 28 and March 23.</p> <p>Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, resulting in the deaths of nearly 2,000 civilians with more than 4.6 million forced to flee the country and millions more internally displaced.</p> <p>The money was announced as Russian troops are widely expected to attack eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>"The next weeks will be decisive," said Josep Borrell, high representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said in a statement. "As Russia prepares for an offensive on the East of Ukraine, it is crucial that we continue and step up our military support to Ukraine to defend its territory and population and prevent further suffering."</p> <p>In Washington, U.S. President Joe Biden also announced an additional \$800 million worth of weapons for Ukraine.</p> <p>The funds were announced as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on world leaders for more weaponry as he warned that if they don't stop Russia from taking over their country, Moldova, Poland, Romania and other Baltic nations will be the Kremlin's next target.</p> <p>"It could only be stopped by force of arms. It must be done now," he said in a video message. "Ukraine needs heavy artillery, armored vehicles, air defense systems and combat aircrafts. Anything to repel Russian repel Russian forces and stop their war crimes."</p> <p>Tanks, armored vehicles and multiple launch rocket systems were among the weapons he said they required.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Myanmar troops seek to crush resistance
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/troops-burn-villages-myanmar-heartland-see-crush-resistance-2022-04-14/
GIST	<p>April 14 (Reuters) - Rubble and ashes, overlooked by a single golden pagoda, are almost all that remain of the wood and brick houses most people had built for themselves in the quiet riverside village of Bin in the Buddhist heartland of central Myanmar.</p> <p>Bin is one of more than 100 villages partially or completely burned by Myanmar's military since the start of this year, its homes among more than 5,500 civilian buildings razed as troops try to suppress opposition to last year's coup, according to media reports collated by activist group Data For Myanmar.</p> <p>Dozens of satellite images reviewed by Reuters, supplied by U.S earth-imaging company Planet Labs and U.S space agency NASA, show widespread torching of villages in the central part of the country. The photos, largely confirming the local media reports, are among the strongest evidence to date that the</p>

military is using widespread arson to step up its assault on resistance in the central Sagaing region, where residents have told Reuters there is armed opposition to the junta.

"It's a campaign of terror," Tom Andrews, the United Nations special envoy for human rights in Myanmar, told Reuters. "If you live in an area or village that they (the junta) think is particularly supportive of those that have taken up arms then you are, in their view, the enemy."

Andrews, who is based in the United States, told Reuters he has spoken by phone with several witnesses and other people providing him with information on the ground. He said these people told him that the military had increased attacks in Sagaing over the past few months, with soldiers leading ground assaults and jets carrying out air strikes.

The junta, which overthrew the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, 2021, has declared any opposition to it illegal and says the military is seeking to restore order in the country. Myanmar's military did not respond to requests for comment for this story. Over the past few months the junta has accused opposition forces of burning villages, without presenting evidence.

The military and pro-military militias have been setting fire to villages in central Myanmar almost every day since December, according to reports from BBC Burmese and local media collated by Data For Myanmar and seen by Reuters. Publicly available NASA satellite photos confirm the location of almost all the largest blazes.

Military attacks and arson have led to large-scale displacements, residents told Reuters. More than 52,000 people fled their homes in the last week of February alone, according to the United Nations.

The recent burnings are the first time such a tactic has been seen in the formerly peaceful, mostly Buddhist central heartland. Over the past year, the region has been the site of intense fighting between junta troops and groups belonging to the People's Defence Force (PDF), the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG), which was ousted in the coup. The junta has declared the NUG and PDF illegal and branded them terrorists.

Reuters spoke to 14 villagers from the Sagaing region who described how soldiers torched their settlements. Reuters was unable to confirm certain aspects of their accounts. But they were nonetheless consistent with the satellite images seen by the news agency.

'DESTROYED IN A SECOND'

Bin was set ablaze by the military on Jan. 31, according to seven residents who spoke to Reuters.

Photographs and video of Bin taken by locals over the following days, seen by Reuters, show villagers picking their way through a burned wasteland. "We lost everything we have," 41-year-old Maung Zaw, a peanut farmer, told Reuters by phone. "I will fight against this military dictatorship to the end."

Three people said they helped carry elderly relatives and friends out of their homes as they were about to be torched or already blazing. One man, who asked not to be named for fear of retribution by the military, told Reuters he crawled into nearby fields and covered himself with tomato plants to hide from the soldiers.

A satellite photo dated Feb. 7, shared with Reuters by Planet Labs, shows much of the village burned to ashes, with about 100 homes destroyed. A photo from Nov. 27 shows the village intact. Reuters also saw six photographs and a video taken by residents from a drone, showing the destruction.

The witnesses said nobody was killed but they lost storehouses full of crops and food for animals as well as their homes, built over generations.

"We built our house our whole lives, it has been destroyed in a second," said a teacher in his 20s from Bin, who asked not to be named, for fear of retribution from the military.

Reuters was unable to reach local authorities in the region to confirm the attack on Bin and other villages.

The burning of villages and displacement of inhabitants in areas such as Sagaing and Magway – where much of the country's crops are produced - will disrupt sowing and harvesting, according to the Myanmar Food Security Cluster, a body coordinating the response of U.N. and aid organizations to food crises in the country. "Reduction in production in such areas will lead to deficit in overall food supply and will further escalate the already high food prices," the group told Reuters in a statement this week.

FAMILIAR TACTIC

Beyond the razing of Bin, seven other people told Reuters they witnessed the burning of another three villages in the Sagaing region in February: Ohn Hnae Bok, Hna Ma Sar Yit and Chaung-U. Three NASA images and eight Planet Labs photos show fires took place in those villages on the dates the people described the attacks.

Two people from Hna Ma Sar Yit said soldiers shot two people dead while three elderly people burned to death in their homes. Reuters could not independently verify their accounts. Myanmar's military has cut internet access across Sagaing region, complicating efforts to authenticate information. The junta did not respond to requests for comment.

Burning villages is a decades-old tactic of the Myanmar military, several analysts told Reuters, used to deprive insurgencies of support. Most recently, the army destroyed hundreds of villages in 2017 as it pushed hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya out of the Rakhine region.

Last month the United States formally determined that the Myanmar military committed genocide against the Rohingya. The United Nations has said Myanmar troops carried out a crackdown with "genocidal intent" that included mass killings, arson and rape. Without evidence, Myanmar's military said the Rohingya burned their own homes down.

The military is "attempting to crush, or at least reduce to a manageable level," resistance forces in Sagaing before the onset of the monsoon season in May or June, when troop movement becomes more difficult, said Anthony Davis, a security analyst with the UK-based Janes defence intelligence company.

The junta did not respond to requests for comment.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Russia threatens attacks on Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/russia-ukraine-kyiv-retribution/2022/04/13/id/1065664/
GIST	<p>Russia is threatening air strikes on Kyiv as retribution for what it claims is Ukraine's sabotage efforts and missile attacks on Russian territories.</p> <p>"If cases of sabotage and shelling continue, Russian armed forces will strike the place where such decisions are being made," the statement from the Russian Ministry of Defense read. "Kyiv will be one of the targets, despite the fact that Russia has so far avoided bombing the capital."</p> <p>This announcement comes after multiple reports of explosions and gunfire in Russia's towns that border Ukraine, which the Ukrainian government has blamed on Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>Kyiv already has been attacked, with 208 residential buildings, 46 schools, and 17 hospitals damaged since the start of the war Feb. 24, according to statistics released by the Kyiv Regional Administration.</p>

The threat, which claims Ukraine has bombed Russia, is believed to refer to a series of explosions in the town of Belgorod, which is 30 miles inside Russia.

An explosion set fire to a fuel depot in the village of Nikolskoye, just outside Belgorod, in the early morning of April 1. Russian news agency TASS blamed the explosion and fire on Ukraine, and Belgorod Gov. Viacheslav Gladkov also accused Ukraine in a subsequent statement.

"The explosion was caused by two Ukrainian helicopters that entered the Russian air space at low altitude," Gladkov said.

However, Ukraine's Conflict Intelligence Team said it analyzed multiple surveillance videos and determined a single rocket caused the explosion came from Russia.

"We were able to establish the exact location of where the dashcam footage was coming from. Turns out, the camera was facing the southeast. In the video, the rocket is coming from the left, that is, from the east or northeast, which means it came from Russian territory," their message read.

Russia's Kursk regional Gov. Roman Starovoit additionally claimed April 13 that a Russian border patrol was attacked "from Ukraine." He reported no injuries or casualties in the incident, which followed a similar charge he made April 9.

"No one got hurt, no damage was done. We fired back and the attack from Ukraine was squashed. We're in constant communication with Russia's armed forces and we ask our citizens to remain calm," he wrote.

Since then, three Russian regions that border Ukraine have been put on high alert for possible attacks.

Ukrainian officials have denied all claims made by Russia and issued a series of statements.

"Russians are planning explosions in Russian residential buildings and bombings to frame the Armed Forces of Ukraine to create the image of Ukraine's 'nationalist war crimes' for their media," read a statement from Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence.

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HEADLINE	04/14 Former France colonies demand reset
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/04/14/down-with-france-former-colonies-in-africa-demand-a-reset/
GIST	<p>BAMAKO, Mali — Many French guests came through the guesthouse where El Bachir Thiam worked as a security guard, a small oasis of greenery in busy Bamako, the capital of the West African country of Mali. They were friendly, usually, and he liked them.</p> <p>But after he had welcomed them in, shown them to their rooms and reassured them that Bamako was safe, not the hotbed of terrorist activity it might seem from outside, he went back to his phone, where his activist WhatsApp groups were focused on one thing. Getting the French — their businesses, diplomats and thousands of troops — out of Mali.</p> <p>Over the past few years there has been a sharp rise in criticism of France across its former colonies in Africa, rooted in a feeling that colonialist practices and paternalistic attitudes never really ended, and propelled by a tide of social media posts, radio shows, demonstrations and conversations on the street.</p> <p>In Senegal, young people attending protests last year accused the president of being a puppet of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who is currently vying for a second term. They smashed the windows of French gas stations and set fire to French supermarkets.</p> <p>In Burkina Faso, as a coup d'état unfolded in January, tailors tore up French flags and pieced the tricolors back together horizontally to make Russian ones.</p>

In Niger last November, after protesters shouting “Down with France!” tried to block a French military convoy, the soldiers opened fire. [They killed two people](#), the Nigerien government said.

Nearly half of the countries in Africa were at one time French colonies or protectorates. Six decades after most of them gained independence, young people like Mr. Thiam — born long after the colonial French departed — are driving this uprising, tapping into a wealth of online information that older generations, [often less educated and literate](#), never had access to, and trying to use it to promote change. And their elders are paying attention.

“There’s a new awakening in sub-Saharan Africa that the world should know about,” said [El Hadi Djitteye](#), a Malian analyst who recently founded a think tank, the Timbuktu Center for Strategic Studies on the Sahel. “If a foreign minister makes a speech today, there’s a group of young analysts that can look at it and say this paragraph is paternalist, that one is aggressive, this isn’t diplomacy.”

Though the tide of information they consume and share sometimes veers into misinformation, including unfounded rumors about France working with jihadists or stealing gold, much of the criticism in countries with ties to France is aimed at the perceived arrogance of the former colonial master. There have always been critiques of France, particularly in more educated, urban circles in West Africa, but now that almost everyone either owns a cellphone or knows somebody who does, these ideas have spread.

In Mali, where for almost a decade French soldiers who initially came at the invitation of the Malian government have tried and failed to stop the spread of armed Islamist groups, France stands accused of disrespecting Malians not just by activists like Mr. Thiam, but by the country’s highest officials, including the prime minister.

“They want to humiliate us,” said Prime Minister Choguel Maiga in [a recent speech](#) which drifted into unfounded conspiracy theory. This kind of rhetoric has helped the military junta that seized power in 2020 retain huge popular support. “We’re not a people that submits.”

This is a stark turnaround from a decade ago. When jihadists took over its northern cities in 2012, Mali appealed to France for military help. And when French soldiers arrived, Malians greeted them as liberating heroes.

Now they are effectively being chased from the country. They are blamed for sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, aimed at trying to get the junta to commit to handing over power — France is assumed to be the group’s puppet master.

The French are blamed for their failure to stop an insurgency that metastasized and spilled over Mali’s borders, destabilizing a vast stretch of arid territory known as the Sahel — even though troops from Mali have also been fighting the insurgents and [now stand accused of massacring](#) hundreds of people together with their new partners, Russian mercenaries. The French are blamed, too, for their support of former rebel groups from the north considered by many in Mali’s powerful south to be no different than the jihadists.

The deteriorating security situation was one of the main things Mr. Thiam posted about on social media during his night shifts at the guesthouse. He built up a following of more than 35,000 friends and followers on Facebook at one point.

But he wasn’t just an online warrior: He co-founded an activist group, *On A Tout Compris* — French for “We’ve Got it All Figured Out” — which organized demonstrations outside the French embassy and targeted French-owned businesses like the petroleum company Total. Soon, he found he was having to duck out of his activist meetings early to get to work on time. Then he left the guesthouse job for full time activism.

His favorite trick was to post videos of himself burning the French flag on Facebook — something that eventually got him banned from the social network, he said. (Facebook said that the burning of flags does

not violate their policies, but he could have been banned for another reason). He said he posted pictures of dead French soldiers, labeling them “other terrorists,” just for shock value.

“We knew that was mean, but it was part of our battle plan,” he said.

French soldiers are now packing up in their bases, preparing to leave, while their leaders focus on their relationships with other, friendlier countries like Niger and Ivory Coast, where this month they will hold a training session with local troops, as they have done for years.

For years after African nations got independence, France maintained a web of political and business ties with its former colonies, often in effect propping up corrupt governments or dictators for its own benefit, a system widely known as *Françafrique*.

When Mr. Macron became president, it initially seemed that things would change. He promised to declassify secret files related to [the assassination of Thomas Sankara](#), Burkina Faso’s revolutionary leader, killed in a putsch in which many suspect France played a role. He asked Rwanda for forgiveness over France’s role in the genocide.

“I am from a generation that doesn’t come to tell Africans what to do,” he [told students](#) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso’s capital, in 2017.

But this rang hollow in January 2020 when he [summoned five African leaders to a summit](#), partly to disavow rising anti-French sentiment in their countries. To many of their citizens back home, Mr. Macron came across as insufferably arrogant.

And in Mali — often, of late, the harbinger for the region, whether in terms of coups or destabilizing Islamist groups — people felt that the arrogance just kept coming — notably, in French ministers’ condemnations of the military junta that [overthrew the president](#), France’s erstwhile ally, [Ibrahim Boubacar Keita](#).

The relationship between the two countries broke down fast.

After France’s foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, called the junta “illegitimate” and “out of control” in January, its ambassador in Bamako was [instructed to leave](#).

On a recent afternoon at the embassy, the ambassador’s spacious office was hushed, the only sign of him a photograph atop his office chair, where he jokingly propped it on his way out.

Many Malians still bristle at that “illegitimate” label: of course, they say, the junta was not elected. But many feel they have been failed by democracy as France conceives it, and that the junta speaks for them.

“Stop thinking we are inferior,” said Pierre Togo, a former soldier, addressing France as he nursed a mango juice at a Bamako bar on a recent evening. “France is plotting, playing games, and Africans understand that now.”

Across town, at a busy roundabout where vendors sold Malian flags, Lassina Keita, a mechanic, wiped oil-stained hands on his shirt, to which was clipped the source of all his information, a small yellow radio. “It’s better to say thank you, and let them go,” he said of the French.

But while these sentiments are common in the capital, some Malians from the north and center, where the insurgency is raging, see things differently.

In a quiet suburb of Bamako, Ami Walet Idrissa and Bintou Walet Abdou, both 22, chatted in Ami’s house, its rough cinder block walls heating in the sun. They reminisced about their lives back home in Timbuktu, which was taken by Islamist militants, after arms and men flooded into the country in the wake of Libya’s [descent into chaos](#).

	<p>“France helped Mali a lot,” said Bintou.</p> <p>“They’re the ones who chased the jihadists out,” Ami said.</p> <p>When jihadists took over Timbuktu in 2012, Ami was 13. Her parents had fled, but she stayed behind with her siblings. One day, walking home after bathing in the river, armed men stopped Ami and her brother. Males and females were forbidden from walking together, they said — siblings or not. They whipped them both, she said.</p> <p>Both women worried about what would happen if the French left, but they never said so in public, even when people equated the French with jihadists, as they often did. Their opinions could invite trouble in Bamako.</p> <p>Were France’s harshest critics living in areas threatened by extremists or abusive military forces, rather than safely in Bamako, things could be different.</p> <p>At the leafy guesthouse, one of Mr. Thiam’s former co-workers was amused to hear what his old colleague was up to.</p> <p>“Send him to Dogon country, let him hear a bit of gunfire,” he said with a smile, referring to an area often attacked by the armed groups that France fought. “He’ll run back yelling ‘Vive la France!’”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/12 Airfare up 20% over pre-pandemic levels
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/12/airfare-surged-20percent-over-pre-pandemic-levels-as-inflation-hit-vacations.html
GIST	<p>Airfare is surging as higher fuel prices and strong travel demand drive up the cost of flights.</p> <p>Consumers spent \$8.8 billion on domestic U.S. airline tickets last month, up 28% compared with March 2019, before the Covid pandemic, while fares surged 20%, according to data from the Adobe Digital Economy Index that was published Tuesday. Bookings only rose 12%.</p> <p>Higher fares are one of the latest examples of inflation, which is hitting consumers at gas stations, supermarkets and in the housing market.</p> <p>Airline executives have been confident that they could pass along the bulk in the surge in jet fuel to travelers, who so far appear willing to shell out more for travel after two years of Covid lockdowns. Benchmark U.S. Gulf Coast jet fuel settled at \$3.2827 a gallon on Monday, up nearly 50% from the start of 2022 and more than double a year ago, according to Platts.</p> <p>Delta Air Lines will kick off airline reporting season before the market opens on Wednesday and company executives will provide an outlook on travel demand, cost and fares.</p> <p>For travel from June through August, online spending is up 8% compared with 2019, and bookings are up 3%, according to the Adobe data, which track bookings at the biggest six U.S. airlines’ platforms.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Holiday travel back: long lines, big waits
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/holiday-travel-is-backwith-long-lines-and-big-waits-11649859655
GIST	Large crowds are snarling airports across the world as holiday travel returns to levels not seen since before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many travel restrictions imposed over the past two years have now been lifted and people are making up for lost time to visit relatives, travel for work or take a vacation, especially during the Easter holidays. But airlines and airports are struggling to ramp up, as a labor shortage stymies efforts to recruit new workers and Covid infections sideline many existing employees.

The airport in Austin, Texas, has been overrun in recent weeks, with long lines for security, and to return rental cars late last month. In the U.K., British Airways has made cuts to its flying schedule until May, while London Heathrow Airport says it is scrambling to hire 12,000 workers. And in Sydney, Australia's biggest city, the airport is expecting Thursday—the day before a four-day Easter weekend—to be the busiest domestic-travel day since March 2020, a huge challenge with 20% of its staff missing work every day because of Covid-19.

“This is the longest line I think I’ve ever waited in, and we’ve done quite a bit of traveling,” said Mary Beth Wood, 65 years old, as she stood in a security line that occasionally snaked outside the door at Sydney Airport on Wednesday afternoon.

Airlines spent much of the pandemic laying off or furloughing thousands of workers and mothballing planes. Many pilots—once considered a dream job—had to find work elsewhere, from grocery stores to farms where they operated heavy machinery instead of jumbo jets. Now, the aviation sector is competing for workers with other industries, from truck driving to hospitality, that are also experiencing a surge in demand.

“Unfortunately, this is an industry where you can’t ramp down and ramp up overnight,” said Subhas Menon, director general of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines. “It takes a bit of time to make sure that you have staff who are trained.”

The International Air Transport Association, an airline industry group, warned this month that airports, governments and other infrastructure providers should prepare for the huge increase in passenger numbers as recovery in air travel gathered pace. Although international travel has been slower to rebound, the latest IATA figures show that domestic travel in February rose 61% compared with last year and was only 22% below 2019 levels.

In the U.S., airlines have had almost a year to adjust to rising passenger volumes, but even so passengers have faced periodic snarls as spring-break travel has overwhelmed them. Fliers at New York’s LaGuardia Airport faced waits of 40 to 50 minutes Tuesday morning amid high volumes of passengers, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said.

The Transportation Security Administration, which oversees screening at U.S. airports, said it is monitoring wait times and preparing for more traffic. It started recruiting early, anticipating summer-travel increases and has been hiring aggressively, a spokesman said. It will also send officers from its “national deployment force” to areas where there are spikes and surges. Austin is one of those airports. In Austin, TSA has approved a 15% retention bonus to head off attrition, and is offering a \$2,000 signing bonus for new hires.

Some U.S. airlines have said they don’t have enough staff to recover quickly when bad weather or other disruptions hit. Alaska Air Group said it will trim 2% of flying through the end of June as it looks to catch up on pilot training. JetBlue Airways said it will cut its schedule by between 8% and 10% in May and throughout the summer to alleviate staffing strains.

JetBlue told crew members in a memo over the weekend that its efforts to account for staffing, equipment, aircraft availability and airport infrastructure to plan its schedule had been upended.

“Covid has thrown all kinds of twists in this process,” President Joanna Geraghty wrote.

Delta Air Lines has hired about 15,000 new employees since the start of last year, in part to replace those who left during the pandemic, Chief Executive Ed Bastian said in an interview Tuesday. “I feel good about our staffing position,” he said. “We’ve got out way ahead of this.”

The U.K. experienced a surge in flying after the country became the first in the world to remove all Covid-related travel restrictions. In the north of England, Manchester Airport recently issued an apology to passengers after travelers faced hours of delays.

Staff shortages there have meant that not all security lanes can be opened, and an executive warned passengers should prepare to wait as long as 90 minutes over the next few months as it recruits new staff and puts each through a government vetting process.

“The simple fact is that we don’t currently have the number of staff we need to provide the level of service that our passengers deserve,” Manchester Airports Group Chief Executive Charlie Cornish said. “We’re doing this in one of the most challenging employment markets we have seen, with competition from many other businesses that find themselves in the same position.”

In Asia, airlines face other challenges—rerouting some of their flights around Russian airspace in the aftermath of that country’s invasion of Ukraine, adding hours to flight times, increasing fuel costs and making journeys less appealing for travelers.

Japan Airlines flights connecting Haneda with Europe now use a north route—flying over Alaska, Greenland and Iceland—that adds up to six hours to the journey time from Helsinki. A JAL spokesman said that the airline has kept the ticket price unchanged so far and, starting from April 19, there are plans to use a southerly route to take advantage of tailwinds to save energy and time.

In Australia, which reopened its border to tourists in February, the crowds at the country’s airports have dominated local news for the past several days. Qantas Airways Ltd., Australia’s main airline, has diverted some employees who usually don’t work at the airport to help guide passengers and assist with baggage, while Sydney Airport said it is deploying senior executives into terminals to help manage lines.

The airport’s security contractor has been recruiting since December for more than 100 security-screening roles, but has struggled to find enough workers, a problem in Australia following nearly two years of strict border closures that stymied immigration. The airport said 50 new screening staff will gradually become available in the coming weeks, but that the process to train new staff takes two months.

“This industry has been completely smashed and we’ve been building from the ground up,” said Geoff Culbert, the airport’s chief executive, in a television interview. “We just can’t get the people into the roles because we’re all fighting over the same resources.”

Adding to the woes are that passengers are also rusty when it comes to going through security, said Qantas Chief Executive Alan Joyce. Prior to the pandemic, 10% of passengers needed to be rescreened while going through security, but now that figure is up to 30%, Mr. Joyce said. That adds 45 seconds per person, which piles up if thousands of people are traveling.

As the security line began to move at Sydney’s airport, Ms. Wood, who only had carry-on luggage, said she wasn’t concerned about missing her roughly 90-minute domestic flight to Melbourne, given that she arrived in good time and had about an hour and a half until boarding.

“We’ve learned to go with the flow,” said Ms. Wood, who was visiting Australia from California. “As long as we get through on time, we’ll be all right. If we miss our flight, then we’ll be at a high level of horror.”

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SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/us-life-expectancy-fell-by-2-yrs-in-2020-sharpest-drop-among-high-income-peers/ar-AAWba8Y
GIST	<p>(Reuters) - Life expectancy in the United States fell by nearly two years in 2020 to about 77 years amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the sharpest drop compared to 19 other high-income countries, according to a recent analysis.</p> <p>Americans, on average, had a life expectancy of 76.99 years in 2020, down from 78.86 years in 2019, according to the study, which looked at national death and population counts in 2019 and 2020, as well as provisional data for 2021 to calculate mortality rate ratios.</p> <p>The decline of 1.87 years in life expectancy for 2020 was far higher than the mean reduction of 0.57 years in 19 peer countries, including Canada, France, Germany, Denmark and South Korea. No country experienced a decrease as steep as that of the United States, according to the analysis, which was published as a preprint on the medRxiv website.</p> <p>U.S. COVID-19 mortality and excess deaths were among the highest in the world and the virus was the third leading cause of death in the United States in 2020, after heart disease and cancer.</p> <p>Based on provisional 2021 data, U.S. life expectancy fell even further last year, to an estimated 76.60 years.</p> <p>Authors of the study said the United States mismanaged the federal, state and local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at the start, contributing to higher death rates than those in other countries. The pandemic response exacerbated the life expectancy gap between the U.S. and its peers.</p> <p>"The fact the U.S. lost so many more lives than other high-income countries speaks not only to how we managed the pandemic but also to more deeply rooted problems that predated the pandemic," said Steven H. Woolf, one of the study authors and faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University.</p> <p>"U.S. life expectancy has been falling behind other countries since the 1980s, and the gap has widened over time, especially in the last decade," he said.</p> <p>Woolf said Americans die at higher rates because of heart disease, diabetes and dozens of other conditions. The lack of universal health care, income and educational inequality, and less healthy physical and social environments also contributed.</p> <p>The study findings mirrored earlier estimates from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (https://bit.ly/3xp31kI) that showed 2020 life expectancy was 77 years for the total U.S. population, a decrease of 1.8 years from 78.8 years in 2019, the biggest decline since World War II.</p> <p>With the pandemic in its third year, close to a million Americans have died due to COVID-19, according to the CDC.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Kremlin crackdown silences war protests
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-moscow-347cf5d867eb34b1e8469f942685b673
GIST	<p>A former police officer who discussed Russia's invasion on the phone. A priest who preached to his congregation about the suffering of Ukrainians. A student who held up a banner with no words — just asterisks.</p> <p>Hundreds of Russians are facing charges for speaking out against the war in Ukraine since a repressive law was passed last month that outlaws the spread of "false information" about the invasion and disparaging the military.</p>

Human rights groups say the crackdown has led to criminal prosecutions and possible prison sentences for at least 23 people on the “false information” charge, with over 500 others facing misdemeanor charges of disparaging the military that have either led to hefty fines or are expected to result in them.

“This is a large amount, an unprecedentedly large amount” of cases, said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms legal aid group focusing on free speech cases, in an interview with The Associated Press.

The Kremlin has sought to control the narrative of the war from the moment its troops rolled into Ukraine. It dubbed the attack a “special military operation” and increased the pressure on independent Russian media that called it a “war” or an “invasion,” blocking access to many news sites whose coverage deviated from the official line.

Sweeping arrests stifled antiwar protests, turning them from a daily event in large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg into rare occurrences barely attracting any attention.

Still, reports of police detaining single picketers in different Russian cities come in almost daily.

Even seemingly benign actions have led to arrests.

A man was detained in Moscow after standing next to a World War II monument that says “Kyiv” for the city’s heroic stand against Nazi Germany and holding a copy of Tolstoy’s “War and Peace.” Another was reportedly detained for holding up a package of sliced ham from the meat producer Miratorg, with the second half of the name crossed off so it read: “Mir” — “peace” in Russian.

A law against spreading “fake news” about the war or disparaging the military was passed by parliament in one day and took force immediately, effectively exposing anyone critical of the conflict to fines and prison sentences.

The first publicly known criminal cases over “fakes” targeted public figures like Veronika Belotserkovskaya, a Russian-language cookbook author and popular blogger living abroad, and Alexander Nevzorov, a TV journalist, film director and former lawmaker.

Both were accused of posting “false information” about Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine on their widely followed social media pages — something Moscow has vehemently denied, insisting that Russian forces only hit target military targets.

But then the scope of the crackdown expanded, with police seemingly grabbing anyone.

Former police officer Sergei Klovov was detained and put in pretrial detention after discussing the war with his friends on the phone. His wife told the Meduza news site that in casual conversation at home, Klovov, who was born in Irpin near Kyiv and whose father still lived in Ukraine when Russian troops rolled in, condemned the invasion.

Klovov was charged with spreading false information about the Russian armed forces and faces up to 10 years in prison.

St. Petersburg artist Sasha Skolichenko also faces up to 10 years in prison on the same charge: She replaced price tags in a grocery store with antiwar flyers. On Wednesday, a court ordered Skolichenko to pretrial detention for 1 1/2 months.

The Rev. Ioann Burdin, a Russian Orthodox priest in a village about 300 kilometers (about 185 miles) northeast of Moscow, was fined 35,000 rubles (\$432) for “discrediting the Russian armed forces” after posting an antiwar statement on his church’s website and talking to a dozen congregants during a service about the pain he felt over people in Ukrain’e dying.

Burdin told AP his speech elicited mixed reactions. “One woman made a scene over the fact that I’m talking about (it) when she just came to pray,” he said, adding that he believed it was one of those hearing the sermon who reported him to the police.

Marat Grachev, director of a shop that repairs Apple products in Moscow, similarly got in trouble when he displayed a link to an online petition titled, “No to war” on a screen in the shop. Many customers expressed support when they saw it, but one elderly man demanded it be taken down, threatening to report Grachev to the authorities.

Police soon showed up, and Grachev was charged with discrediting the military. A court ordered him to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles (\$1,236).

Another court ruled against Moscow student Dmitry Reznikov for displaying a blank piece of paper with eight asterisks, which could have been interpreted as standing for “No to war” in Russian -- a popular chant by protesters. The court found him guilty of discrediting the armed forces and fined him 50,000 rubles (\$618) for holding the sign in central Moscow in a mid-March demonstration that lasted only seconds before police detained him.

“It’s the theater of the absurd,” his lawyer Oleg Filatchev told AP.

A St. Petersburg court last week fined Artur Dmitriev for a sign containing President Vladimir Putin’s quote – albeit with a few words omitted for brevity – from last year’s Victory Day parade marking the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

“The war brought about so many unbearable challenges, grief and tears, that it’s impossible to forget. There is no forgiveness and justification for those who once again are harboring aggressive plans,” Putin had said, according to the Kremlin website.

Dmitriev was fined 30,000 rubles for discrediting the Russian military. That prompted him to post Friday on Facebook: “The phrase by Vladimir Putin, and ergo he himself ... are discrediting the goals of the Russian armed forces. From this moment on, (internet and media regulator) Roskomnadzor must block all speeches by Putin, and true patriots — take down his portraits in their offices.”

Net Freedoms’ Gainutdinov said that anything about the military or Ukraine can make a person a target. Even wearing a hat with the blue and gold of the Ukrainian flag or a green ribbon, considered a symbol of peace, have been found to discredit the military, the lawyer added.

Reznikov, who is appealing his conviction for the poster with asterisks, said he found the crackdown scary. After his first misdemeanor conviction, a second strike would result in criminal prosecution and a possible prison term of up to three years.

Both Burdin and Grachev, who also are appealing, received donations that exceeded their fines.

“I realized how important it is, how valuable it is to receive support,” Grachev said.

Burdin said the publicity about his case spread his message far beyond the dozen or so people who initially heard his sermon — the opposite of what the authorities presumably intended by fining him.

“It’s impossible to call it anything other than the providence of God,” the priest added. “The words that I said reached a much larger number of people.”

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HEADLINE	04/14 Russia threatens new nuclear deployments
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/14/russia-threatens-new-nuclear-deployments-if-sweden-finland-join-nato.html

Russia says a nuclear-free Baltic region would no longer be possible if Finland and Sweden join NATO, alluding to additional nuclear deployments in Europe.

“If Sweden and Finland join NATO, the length of the alliance’s land borders with the Russian Federation will more than double. Naturally, these borders will have to be strengthened,” Dmitry Medvedev, former president and deputy chairman of Russia’s Security Council, wrote on his official Telegram channel on Thursday.

Russia will have to “seriously strengthen the grouping of land forces and air defense, deploy significant naval forces in the waters of the Gulf of Finland. In this case, it will no longer be possible to talk about any nuclear-free status of the Baltic - the balance must be restored,” he said.

The comments come a day after [Finland and Sweden said their decision on whether to apply for NATO membership would come within a matter of weeks](#). The countries’ leaders said their security assessments had dramatically changed following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February.

The Baltics, which includes the north-eastern European countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, are members of the EU and NATO. Finland and Sweden are members of the EU, but not NATO, and the latter shares a 830-mile border with Russia.

If Finland and Sweden did join NATO, this would give Moscow “more officially registered opponents,” Medvedev added. He claimed that NATO was planning to admit the two Nordic states with “minimal bureaucratic procedures.”

Russia’s response should be taken with “no emotion, with a cold head,” he added.

Moscow sees neighboring Finland’s potential inclusion in NATO as a threat to its national security, as the U.S. could deploy advanced military equipment in Finland if it joined the alliance.

‘Nothing new’

Lithuania, which borders the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, brushed off Medvedev’s comments on Thursday.

It’s “nothing new,” Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte said. The country’s Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas added that Russia already has nuclear weapons in the Baltic region.

“The current Russian threats look quite strange, when we know that, even without the present security situation, they keep the weapon 100 km from Lithuania’s border,” Anusauskas was quoted by Lithuania’s BNS wire as saying.

“Nuclear weapons have always been kept in Kaliningrad ... the international community, the countries in the region, are perfectly aware of this ... They use it as a threat,” he added.

Kaliningrad, which is slightly larger than Connecticut, borders the Baltic sea on its west and is sandwiched between NATO members Poland and Lithuania.

Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has triggered a U-turn in Finnish public opinion on joining the 30-member military alliance, which it has refrained from joining since World War II in a bid to maintain neutrality. Moscow has in the past warned of severe consequences and instability in the Nordics if Finland were to join.

If Finland joined the alliance, Sweden would likely follow suit. Finland and Sweden, as well as Ukraine, are already “Enhanced Opportunity Partners” of NATO, the closest form of partnership with the alliance, and partake in military exercises with NATO states.

Rather than urging the countries to pursue membership, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has [repeatedly](#) said it is for Finland and Sweden to decide their own path. He has also said “the door remains open” for the alliance to welcome new members.

But Russia has long warned against any enlargement of NATO, reportedly accusing the alliance of being “a tool geared towards confrontation.” Ahead of its invasion of Ukraine, it demanded that the organization, which was created in 1949 in response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union, return to its pre-1997 borders — something the U.S. and NATO refused.

Fourteen countries have joined the collective defense alliance since 1997, accounting for nearly half of its members. These countries include much of central and eastern Europe, and the first NATO members to border Russia and its exclave territory of Kaliningrad: Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Moscow blames Ukraine’s pursuit of NATO membership, among other things, for triggering the Russian invasion, saying it threatened Russia’s security. NATO leaders have reiterated that they will not send troops into Ukraine to help in their fight against Russia, primarily because the country is not a member of the alliance.

“The persistent attempts by NATO to draw those countries into the orbit of its interests and opportunistic policies haven’t gone unnoticed by Russia,” Russian’s foreign ministry said in December 2021.

“It’s quite obvious that Finland and Sweden joining NATO ... would have serious military and political consequences that would require an adequate response from the Russian side,” ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at the time.

Risks abound

Finland and Sweden’s leaders say they are aware of the risk of escalation.

“We also need to be very frank about consequences and risks. There are both short-term and more long-term risks. These risks are there both if we apply and if we do not apply,” Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said during a press conference Wednesday.

Still, looking at the devastation wrought on Ukraine in a matter of weeks, Marin pointed to the significance of being a fully-fledged NATO member, rather than just a partner, which is its current status.

“The difference between being a partner and being a member is very clear and will remain so,” Marin said. “There is no other way to have security guarantees than under NATO’s deterrence and common defense as guaranteed by NATO’s Article 5.”

The alliance’s Article 5 embodies the principle of collective defense. In short, Article 5 means that an attack against one NATO member is considered an attack against all the allies.

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HEADLINE	04/14 Another bus drops off migrants in D.C.
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/politics/second-texas-bus-migrants-near-us-capitol-washington-dc
GIST	<p>A second bus from Texas arrived near the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., just before 4:30 a.m. Thursday, transporting more than a dozen illegal immigrants as part of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's new plan to counter federal immigration policies during an ongoing border crisis.</p> <p>Abbott announced last week that he was directing the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to transport migrants released from federal custody in Texas to the nation’s capital and other locations outside his state.</p> <p>Fourteen migrants stepped off the bus a block from Union Station on First Street. The migrants are from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Colombia, one man said.</p>

One individual, who identified himself as Juan from Colombia, told Fox News that he flew by plane to Mexico and crossed the Rio Grande into the U.S.

Juan and his friend said they are going to New York to join their friends. Juan said he wants to be a barber.

Capitol Police arrived at around 4:45 a.m. to ask questions. Members of a Catholic charity arrived, waiting for the migrants, who began to walk to Union Station at around 4:47 a.m.

Thursday's arrival follows that of the first bus, which arrived in the nation's capital Wednesday morning. That bus also carried immigrants from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Colombia. Fox News learned that they had come from the Del Rio sector in Texas.

According to TDEM, Abbott's plan is already working. The agency told Fox News on Monday that many of the communities that originally reached out for support – from the Rio Grande Valley to Terrell County – say the federal government stopped dropping immigrants in their towns since Abbott's announcement on April 6.

TDEM said it dispatched buses over the weekend to border communities where it coordinated with officials to identify these immigrants. The agency added that each bus has the capacity and supplies necessary to carry up to 40 migrants released in Texas communities and transport them to Washington, D.C.

The governor's legal authority to transport busloads of migrants to the U.S. Capitol remains in question. The 2012 Supreme Court case *Arizona v. the United States* prevents states from making their own immigration policies.

Abbott insists that the federal government is failing to adequately address the situation.

"Texans demand and deserve an aggressive, comprehensive strategy to secure our border—not President Biden's lackluster leadership," Abbott said in a statement. "As the federal government continues to roll back commonsense policies that once kept our communities safe, our local law enforcement has stepped up to protect Texans from dangerous criminals, deadly drugs, and illegal contraband flooding into the Lone Star State."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Salary transparency impact job hunt in WA?
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2022/04/how-salary-transparency-could-impact-job-hunt-washington-state
GIST	<p>A year ago, Emma Fazio was browsing Indeed, a popular job search website, when she came across a food service position in Vancouver, Washington. She filled out an online application and interviewed a week later with a hiring manager, who offered her a job on the spot.</p> <p>“[They] gave me paperwork to fill out, and as I was skimming through it they told me the hourly rate,” Fazio said. “I was extremely surprised and more than a little disappointed because my last job offered \$2 per hour more.”</p> <p>The restaurant -- which Fazio requested remain unnamed -- didn’t reveal its pay scale until the final moment of the hiring process.</p> <p>Fazio’s frustration is common among job seekers, who historically don’t have much leverage when it comes to learning what a position will pay until they’re deep into the interview process. But a bill passed by the Washington Legislature and signed by Gov. Jay Inslee on March 30 will change that.</p> <p>Senate Bill 5761 requires employers to disclose a salary range upfront in print or online job postings and provide general information about the position’s benefits.</p>

In addition to saving time for both employers and applicants, bill sponsor state Sen. Emily Randall, D-Bremerton, argues, the measure will improve transparency by empowering applicants with more information when they negotiate their salaries. She also hopes it will help narrow stubborn pay gaps for women and people of color, she said.

“It’s not fair and equitable to lowball folks, or to hide the ball in recruiting when not everyone comes with the same resources,” Randall said. “Folks would know whether it was a good fit for them, and whether it was something they could support themselves and their families. I think it’s about equity — that’s the bottom line.”

The bill would apply to jobs in Washington across the economic spectrum, from minimum wage work to specialized, elite roles. Cher Scarlett, a Kirkland-based software engineer with a salary well into six figures, was among the bill’s early supporters during legislative committee hearings.

Scarlett left Apple in 2021 amid [a highly publicized conflict](#) over pay transparency, after, she says, the company refused to tell her what her new salary would be when she transferred to a different office within Apple.

In a Feb. 16 hearing before the House Labor and Workplace Standards Committee, Scarlett described software engineering as a field “in which salaries are commonly taboo to discuss and range widely from company to company.”

“It’s often difficult to know whether or not you’re being undercompensated relative to your peers,” Scarlett explained.

Applies to internal transfers, too

Under SB 5761, companies based in Washington state with 15 or more employees will be required to include a salary range and basic benefit information in a job posting. The rule kicks in on Jan. 1, 2023 and may have changed Scarlett’s situation.

[The text of the bill](#) itself defines a job posting as “any solicitation intended to recruit job applicants for a specific position,” from the employer themselves or through a third party, such as an employment agency or headhunting firm. Wage transparency requirements will apply to internal transfers within Washington companies, too.

Solicitations subject to the law include “any postings done electronically, or with a printed hard copy, that includes qualifications for desired applicants.”

In practice, the precise meaning of “includes qualifications” will need to be ironed out by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, which has been tasked with creating a complaint reporting and investigations process before the rule’s launch date.

A simple “Help Wanted” sign posted in a restaurant window, for instance, probably wouldn’t fall under purview of SB 5761. An “Experienced Line Cook Wanted” sign likely would. But at this point, the business groups that pushed back against the bill aren’t entirely sure where that distinction will ultimately lie.

“It’s passed, and everybody will do their best to comply with it,” said Bruce Beckett, a lobbyist for the Washington Retail Association, who had testified against the bill during its public hearings. “But there’s zero guidance. That’s part of the problem.”

Limitations of the new law

Beckett said the new rule is overly controlling of businesses, which he claims often don’t know what salary or benefits they should offer until they start vetting a pool of applicants.

The law could also discourage companies based outside of the state from hiring Washington workers for remote jobs because they don't want to deal with the salary posting requirements, Beckett said. He pointed to a comparable Colorado law implemented early last year.

[A June advisory](#) from the Society for Human Resource Management, the national certifying and networking organization of HR professionals, stated that some employers are likely excluding Colorado applicants as a way of skirting the law, although it didn't point to any specific data.

Anecdotally, some job postings for remote roles expressly prohibit any work from being done in Colorado. [Coloradoexcluded.com](#), an online database that tracks which businesses have stated that restriction outright on job postings, lists 211 companies. The group includes eBay, Century 21 and the University of Phoenix.

But the Washington Legislature isn't the only government body following in Colorado's footsteps. [New York City](#), home to headquarters of many major companies, will see a similar job posting law implemented in May. Lawmakers in California and New York state are also working on comparable legislation.

According to Randall, it's too soon to know the full scope of how Colorado workers have been affected by the new pay transparency law, which has been in place for a little over a year.

"I'm not sure that it's been around long enough to have those lessons be really well vetted," Randall said. But the new Washington law will have limitations, she said. For example, it doesn't include any details on what constitutes a salary range.

Could a company theoretically advertise a position that pays between \$15 and \$1 million per hour?

"You could technically be in compliance with the law," Randall said. But, she added, "that would give applicants information about the employer, if they chose to post that."

Beckett also said he's concerned that publicly posting salary data could ultimately harm departing employees in their search for a new role, especially if it indicates a worker is capable of living on less.

"The thing that bothered some of the people I represent is this inadvertently disclosing information that maybe somebody considers proprietary. Someone's who's leaving their old job and looking for a new job may not find it helpful to have their old salary out there," Beckett said.

Shifting power

This bill reflects a broader shift of power from employers to workers, who are continuing to leave their jobs in droves during a pandemic-era "Great Resignation."

For the first time in more than a decade, applicants are finding themselves with some real leverage. There are currently nearly 1.8 unfilled positions for every job seeker, according to [a Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey released on March 29](#).

"I think definitely we're in a moment in which workers are reevaluating what makes a good employer and what makes a fair job, and what a good salary looks like for them," Randall said.

Jeremy Kaiman, head of professional recruitment for the Western offices of headhunting firm LHH Recruitment Solutions, said he sees more and more companies choosing to disclose their salary ranges upfront as a way to stay ahead in a cutthroat labor market — whether it's mandated by law or not.

"It's becoming more common because some companies feel like this is a way for them to attract talent in a tight labor market," Kaiman said. "It's pretty clear that it does create a competitive advantage."

	<p>Job posts that include pay information consistently attract more applicants than those that don't, Kaiman added. And transparency helps in hiring, but the corporate environment it fosters also tends to persuade workers to stick around.</p> <p>His main advice to Washington companies ahead of Jan. 1: Make sure that compensation for your current workers is on par with the salaries you'll need to offer to hire in such a competitive labor market. Because everything is about to become so public, any discrepancies could hurt morale.</p> <p>"It's fair to say that any organization that pays their people market-appropriate compensation is going to have an advantage on retention," Kaiman said. "The question is if a statute like that leads to this."</p> <p>Scarlett — who now works as a senior software engineer at game developer ControlZee -- said it's unlikely the conflict with Apple would have ever caught fire if the company had just been upfront with her about the raise it intended to offer before she transferred to a city with a higher cost of living. Instead, she took it upon herself to conduct her own wage survey among employees and launched a transparency movement called #AppleToo.</p> <p>"The wage survey wouldn't have even happened if the job postings at Apple had pay bands on them," Scarlett said. "This is a normal piece of information I would want for myself."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Police don't understand how fentanyl works
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjb945/cops-still-dont-understand-how-fentanyl-works
GIST	<p>US drug overdoses reached another record high last month, with the CDC attributing nearly two thirds of overdose deaths to the synthetic opioid fentanyl.</p> <p>The increasing prominence of the drug, which can be lethal even in small doses when injected or snorted, has rightly generated alarm. But across the country, law enforcement responses to cases involving fentanyl shows that cops still don't seem to understand anything about how the drug actually works.</p> <p>Last month, the Orange County Sheriff's Department deployed hazmat equipment while searching a vehicle that allegedly contained fentanyl, and called upon the fire department to cleanse their suits. Three deputies became "dizzy," deployed the medicine Narcan on themselves and were taken to the hospital, according to the department's Twitter. The post was quickly ratioed, with hundreds of accounts pointing out that this is not how fentanyl works. And last week, two Ashland County Sheriff deputies were given Narcan and taken to the hospital after experiencing an "overdose reaction" upon finding a bag of fentanyl that split open while searching a woman's bra.</p> <p>The scientific consensus among toxicologists is that proximal exposure to fentanyl does not cause overdoses or other adverse health effects. While people can only get high from fentanyl by injecting, snorting and smoking the drug, about 80 percent of police officers surveyed in three separate studies believed they can overdose by touching it.</p> <p>The Ashland County Sheriff's Department did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The Orange County Sheriff's Department declined to comment. "We do not have any other details to provide other than what we shared on our social media pages on March 29," a spokesperson told Motherboard in an email, referring to the post that was called out for spreading disinformation.</p> <p>Such false beliefs result in what some researchers call "fentanyl panic," a phenomenon that can exacerbate stigma against people who use drugs, complicate overdose rescue procedures, and perpetuate anti-drug policies that are widely known to disproportionately harm the people of color, the unhoused, and other marginalized groups.</p>

The DEA is partially responsible for the panic. In June 2016, the department [released a statement and video](#) to all law enforcement personnel stating that a “small amount [of fentanyl] ingested, or absorbed through your skin can kill you.” (The agency has since removed the video and statement from the internet.) Last year, in a letter to President Biden, the organization Families Against Fentanyl [asked for fentanyl to be declared a weapon of mass destruction](#), again inaccurately stating that “fentanyls can enter the body through ingestion, inhalation, and absorption through the skin and kill quickly, often before an antidote can be administered.”

“It is nothing more than anti-drug user propaganda that fentanyl exposure alone will result in any kind of harmful or potential overdose for someone who is just in the vicinity of fentanyl,” Mariah Francis, a resource associate for the National Harm Reduction Coalition, told *Motherboard*. “It’s misinformation. And treating fentanyl like it’s asbestos or black mold is really just a part of and a continuation of some of the harmful social racial repercussions of the war on drugs.”

Police departments waste public resources when they deploy an excessive response to a perceived threat, activists say. In January, the Tennessee Highway Patrol flew in decontamination equipment by helicopter at [an estimated cost of \\$3,800](#) while responding to a man who was overdosing. Then, after a deputy and EMS worker claimed to experience “symptoms of an overdose,” police and prosecutors criminally charged the man with two felonies for reckless endangerment, demonstrating how prosecutors can use fentanyl panic to accuse drug users of additional crimes.

“Generally, as prosecutors, the more things you can charge somebody with, the more power you have,” Keith Humphreys, former senior policy adviser to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, [told BuzzFeed News](#). “So even if they knew that this was mostly hysteria and hokum, they might still welcome the power. I don’t know if you can change that.”

Media outlets often contribute to the confusion around fentanyl by parroting law enforcement talking points. One study supported by the National Institutes of Health [found](#) that misinformed media reports about fentanyl exposure received approximately 450,000 Facebook shares, potentially reaching nearly 70,000,000 users from 2015-2019.

The American College of Medical Toxicology (ACMT) and the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT) attempted to set the record straight in a 2017 position statement on preventing fentanyl exposure to emergency responders. “[B]ased on our current understanding of the absorption of fentanyl and its analogs, it is very unlikely that small, unintentional skin exposures to tablets or powder would cause significant opioid toxicity,” they wrote. “[I]f toxicity were to occur, it would not develop rapidly, allowing time for removal.”

Nitrile gloves provide sufficient protection during routine handling of the drug, according to the AACT and ACMT, and first responders can wear N95 respirators or P100 masks during rare situations that involve significant airborne suspension of powdered opioids.

But are police officers who claim to experience overdose symptoms misrepresenting the truth? Some experts [say](#) police are likely misattributing panic attack symptoms—dizziness, chest pains and even fainting—as overdose symptoms. Actual opioid overdoses [involve](#) a loss of consciousness, slow and shallow breathing, vomiting and blue or purplish black fingernails and lips.

Many harm reduction workers say police shouldn’t be handling drug-related matters in the first place. From a harm reductionist perspective, communities are safest and healthiest when people have their material needs met, are allowed to make their own choices, and have access to safety tools like fentanyl testing strips. Punishment has been shown to exacerbate unsafe drug use and movement of drugs, they say.

“The War on Drugs was nothing more than an attack on Black and brown bodies and a way to demonize communities of color and blame the lack of a supportive, compassionate healthcare infrastructure on communities who do use drugs,” said Francis. “What we need to do is move away from carceral

punishment for people who use drugs. You're doing nothing to improve the tenable circumstances in a person's life, you don't have a place in the conversation to determine their choices."

Advocates point to places like Portugal, which decriminalized drugs in 2001 alongside implementing harm reduction measures such as syringe distribution programs and increased outpatient services. Within the first five years of implementation, [drug deaths dropped dramatically](#) and drug use is at an all-time low in the country. Meanwhile, the United States has funneled billions of dollars into the War on Drugs, yet overdoses are [at an all-time high](#).

"Decriminalize drugs in the United States, defund the police, take that money and issue it to public 24/7 Harm Reduction Centers," Francis recommended. "So we can actually practically keep our community safe from dying."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Violent rebels taking swaths of Congo
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxd9e9/m23-rebels-congo
GIST	<p>Fighting between a notorious rebel group and government authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo has sparked fears that large parts of the country could see a fresh escalation in violence for the first time in a decade.</p> <p>Baraka Mwaore fled his village in Bunagana, a small town in the northeastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), nearly a week ago. He trekked for hours with hundreds of his neighbours and strangers. They were running from M23 — a violent rebel group that has waged war in the region for the last decade.</p> <p>"The fighting started in the middle of the night, I just ran," Mwaore told VICE World News over the phone as he registered with authorities in the Nyakabande transit camp, western Uganda.</p> <p>It is not the first time Mwaore has had to flee an M23 assault. In 2012, he fled Bunagana for Uganda where he stayed for over a year as a refugee.</p> <p>"I am tired of always running from the conflict and I pray that the government will bring all the help they can get to solve this conflict once and for all," says Mwaore. According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, 10,000 people have crossed into Uganda in the past week to escape the fresh fighting.</p> <p>Now, hundreds of army troops have gathered in the eastern DRC to deal with M23 fighters who have taken large swathes of territory in Rutshuru - the epicentre of this resurgence. The fighting started on the 28th of March when M23 rebels attacked Congolese army positions, claiming the government has failed to honour a 2014 peace deal it signed that would allow the group and its fighters to re-integrate into civilian society.</p> <p>A United Nations helicopter on a reconnaissance mission was downed over Rutshuru, killing everyone on board. The Congolese military has accused M23 of downing the chopper, though the faction denies the charge and instead blames the Congolese army for carrying out the attack in order for UN peacekeeping troops to be given a mandate to directly fight against the rebels again. An M23 spokesperson told VICE World that the group will "soon" share evidence proving that they were not involved in the helicopter accident. The UN mission has not said who it blames for the crash, saying investigations were underway.</p> <p>On Sunday, M23 leadership released a statement announcing their intentions to withdraw from territories they had captured in the recent fighting - as well as "hand over all (soldiers) from the national army captured on the frontline to the International Committee of the Red Cross for proper care" saying they are giving dialogue a chance.</p> <p>Who are the M23?</p>

The M23 movement started as an ethnic Tutsi Congolese rebellion in North Kivu supported by Rwanda and Uganda. Its fighters were largely drawn from the Tutsi group, which has close ties to neighbouring Rwanda.

The name comes from a peace agreement signed on 23 of March, 2009, between the Congolese government and an armed group called the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) led by Bosco Ntaganda, who was nicknamed “the terminator”. As part of the agreement CNDP fighters were integrated into the Congolese national army, FARDC.

However, in April 2012, General Ntaganda and 300 Congolese soldiers mutinied, claiming that the Congolese government had not held up its side of the March 23, 2009 peace agreement. The movement was born on the premise of protecting the Congolese Tutsi population but infighting quickly saw the group disintegrate into two factions and this eventually led to Ntaganda fleeing and surrendering to the US embassy in Kigali, from where he was extradited to the Hague. He’s awaiting trial at the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.

But that has not slowed down M23. Colonel Sultan Makenda, who took charge of the group in early 2012 is still the man leading these fighters back into battle yet again. Makenga fought alongside Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame’s Tutsi rebels who took power in 1994, ending a genocide in which 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis, died. He later joined Rwandan backed forces on their march on Kinshasa where they toppled long-serving leader of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko.

Makenga’s strong military skills came to the fore during his tenure as M23’s military leader. In all, the rebellion lasted 19 months, and saw the rebels momentarily capture Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, in November 2012. Congolese armed forces, backed by the UN Intervention Brigade, finally defeated the group in late 2013 following intense fighting. M23 fighters fled to Rwanda and Uganda where they surrendered and were put in military holding centres. Human rights organisations blamed the group for widespread war crimes, including summary executions, rapes, and the forced recruitment of children. As many as 800,000 people were displaced and hundreds more killed.

It’s not clear what M23’s current firepower and troop numbers are. But analysts agree that any resurgence of the group is worrying. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called reports of the group’s re-emergence “alarming”.

Resurgence

The latest attack is not the first by M23 rebels since their defeat by Congolese national and UN forces in 2013. The group was co-opted by President Joseph Kabila to squash any dissent after he refused to quit the presidency at the end of his two-term mandate.

In 2016, Human Rights Watch accused senior Congolese security agents of recruiting hundreds of former M23 rebel fighters from refugee camps in Uganda and Rwanda, their bases since the November 2013 defeat.

M23 fighters were given new uniforms and weapons before being integrated into police, army and some into the presidential guard units, according to the HRW report. The report further adds that fighters were given explicit orders to use lethal force, including at “point-blank range” if necessary. At least 62 people died and hundreds more were arrested across Kinshasa, Goma and Lubumbashi cities during the unrest .

In late January 2022, the fighters targeted a Congolese army post in Rutshuru territory, a few kilometres north of the town of Goma killing nearly thirty Congolese soldiers and displacing over 2000 people.

State of Siege

Makenga’s M23 is by no means the only source of conflict here; the region has remained unstable since independence from Belgium. According to the Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a joint project of the Congo

Research Group and Human Rights Watch, there are over 120 active armed groups and localised militia in eastern Congo. Many of these groups are responsible for ethnic massacres, rape, forced recruitment of children into their ranks as well as conflict over control of valuable minerals resources that have displaced millions of people.

In their quest to end conflict, different Congolese governments have unsuccessfully tried to integrate some of these rebel fighters into a unified army, with very little success. The latest attempt by President Felix Tshisekedi's government to implement an effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme for several thousand fighters from various armed groups failed with many of the fighters returning to their rebel groups. M23's fighters are demanding to be collectively re-integrated into the Congolese army and their ranks recognised as promised during talks in 2013 and 2019 — however, this is not a possibility under the new disarmament programme. "M23 are still very unpopular in DRC and so it would be hard for any government to accept their demands as this could see other armed groups demand the same," Reagan Miviri, a conflict analyst at KST, told VICE World News.

A two-decades-old UN peacekeeping mission with over 18,000 strong peacekeeping force, has also had very little success in stabilising the region or keeping civilian populations safe. "There is an urgent need for civilian protection as the people of this region have been the biggest victims of this conflict and this should be a priority for all the actors; DRC army, UN Monusco, M23 as well as regional actors such as Uganda and Rwanda," says Miviri. The presence of additional armed forces like the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) only complicates the situation, human rights groups warn. Last December, Uganda sent more than 1,000 troops to Congo to undertake joint operations against the ADF – a Ugandan-Muslim group active in DRC that has been linked to ISIS – following deadly attacks claimed by the group in Uganda.

It is this continued violence that led President Tshisekedi to declare a "state of siege" in North Kivu and Ituri provinces last year, replacing civilian administration with military and police authorities, but critics say it has largely been ineffective as killings and displacement continue unabated.

"For the population in this region fear is ever present, families have been displaced time and time again and these populations are paying the price for endless cycles of violence", Thomas Fessy, a senior researcher on Congo for Human Rights Watch, told VICE World News.

Fessy warns that the conflict situation in eastern Congo only seems to be getting worse, with the number of displaced people as well as armed groups at a record high. "What's clear is that military rule has not provided civilians with adequate security as we are seeing attacks even on displaced communities in camps which should be safe spaces in these two regions."

However, according to Fessy, DRC needs a proper justice and accountability system that holds to account those who commit crimes. "Until we have justice that addresses years of impunity in Congo, it's difficult to see how the cycle of violence will ever end."

Baraka Mwaore, the man who fled his village, said he has lost hope that the war will ever end. "The war has taken a long time and it keeps on re occurring," he told VICE World News. "People are getting killed and the government is not providing adequate security."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Wholesale inflation soars upward: 11.2%
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/economy/articles/2022-04-13/wholesale-inflation-soars-at-11-2-rate-in-march-largest-gain-on-record
GIST	<p>Wholesale inflation rose 11.2% annually in March, driven largely by an increase in the price of gasoline, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on Wednesday.</p> <p>The increase was the highest on record dating back to 2010. On a monthly basis, the index rose 1.4%, above estimates of a 1.1% gain.</p>

Prices for diesel fuel jumped 20.4% for the month. In contrast, prices for beef and veal fell by 7.3% The producer price index report follows Tuesday's consumer price index showing costs rose 8.5% in March on an annual basis, again fueled by increases in the price of energy, particularly gasoline.

Both reports will do little to change the narrative from the Federal Reserve that interest rates are on the rise to combat the worst inflation since the administration of Ronald Reagan. The central bank raised rates by 25 basis points in March and is widely expected to increase them again, this time by 50 basis points, in May.

However, there was one bright spot in the consumer price index for March, with the rate of core inflation, which strips out energy and food costs, dropping to 0.3% in March from 0.5% in February as prices for used cars fell. Meat prices also slowed their growth.

"Used car prices fell 3.8% in March but are still 35.3% above a year ago and over 48% from March 2020," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist at LPL Financial. "As global trade and shipping ports improve, auto manufacturing could likely get a respite."

"As more cars come on the lots, consumers will have more available options and dealers will have more comfortable inventory levels, providing relief in the strained car market," Roach added.

He noted that "starting in February 2016, new and used vehicle prices declined for over two years while the economy continued to grow. This is definitely a 'goldilocks' scenario as prices cooled off without a hard landing."

But the future course of inflation, and the overall economy, depends at this point upon the direction of Russia's war on Ukraine. JPMorgan Chase, a leading global bank, reported first quarter earnings early Wednesday and noted a \$524 million loss from the effects of sanctions and disrupted bond markets caused by the war. The bank said it was adding to its credit reserves amid concern for the economy.

"We remain optimistic on the economy, at least for the short term – consumer and business balance sheets as well as consumer spending remain at healthy levels – but see significant geopolitical and economic challenges ahead due to high inflation, supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine," CEO Jamie Dimon said in announcing the earnings.

Delta and American also gave positive forecasts in their earnings reports, as travelers returned to the skies in the first three months of the year.

Meanwhile, the national average price of a gallon of gas fell to \$4.08 Wednesday morning, according to AAA, a 25-cent drop from the \$4.33 it reached on March 11 following the war in Ukraine. President Joe Biden is emphasizing steps he has taken to combat surging gas prices, including a drawdown of a million barrels a day from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and also the lifting of a ban on summertime use of an ethanol additive.

"I'm doing everything within my power by executive orders to bring down the price and address the Putin price hikes," Biden said Tuesday in Iowa where he announced the ethanol move.

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HEADLINE	04/13 South Africa extends Mozambique mission
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/south-african-army-extends-mission-mozambique-rebels-84060326
GIST	PRETORIA, South Africa -- The deployment of South Africa's military in northern Mozambique has been extended while its role has shifted from aggressively fighting Islamic extremist rebels to a peacekeeping effort, a top general said Wednesday.

About 600 members of the South African National Defence Force have been in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province since October last year and have captured and destroyed several of the extremists' bases, the chief of the South African mission to Mozambique, Gen. Rudzani Maphwanya said Wednesday.

The South African troops are part of a joint regional force of about 1,000 troops sent by the 16-nation Southern African Development Community to support Mozambique in its battle against the rebels. Other countries contributing troops include Angola, Botswana, Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia.

Rwanda has also deployed about 2,000 troops as part of a bilateral agreement with Mozambique.

Addressing the media in Pretoria on Wednesday, Gen. Maphwanya said the offensive by the regional force inflicted “massive losses” against the insurgents. The operation destroyed several bases and recovered weapons including grenade launchers, machine guns, AK-47 rifles, vehicles and technological devices, he said.

“During this operation, the SAMIM (SADC Mission in Mozambique) forces faced a strong resistance from the terrorists but were able to inflict fatal casualties and disrupt as well as continue to dominate and pursue the terrorists in the operational area,” said Maphwanya.

Many of the rebels have been forced out of their bases, according to South African National Defense Forces Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Lindile Yam.

“A lot has been done to dislodge them,” said Yam, adding that the insurgents are trying to get local residents to join their effort to establish Islamic Shariah law in northern Mozambique. “They are even recruiting children as young as five years old,” he said.

Since 2017, the insurgency in Mozambique has been blamed for more than 3,000 deaths, with more than 800,000 people displaced and more than 1 million in need of food aid, according to the U.N. World Food Program.

A summit of leaders of southern African countries on Tuesday approved the transition of the regional force to a more stabilization role, after its more combative offensive against the rebels.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Study: extreme Atlantic hurricane seasons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/hurricanes-atlantic-climate-change-tropical-cyclones
GIST	<p>Extremely active Atlantic hurricane seasons are now twice as likely as they were in the 1980s due to global heating, according to new research that warns the climate crisis is supersizing storms that threaten life and property in coastal areas.</p> <p>Climate breakdown has contributed to a “decisive increase” in intense hurricane activity since 1982, the study states. Researchers in Germany and Switzerland who undertook the analysis wrote that the growing hyperactivity of storms could be “robustly ascribed” to the rising temperature of the oceans.</p> <p>The warming of the sea surface has “contributed significantly to more extreme tropical cyclone seasons and thereby to the fatalities, destruction and trillion-dollar losses that these cyclones have caused over the last four decades”, the research added.</p> <p>Previous research has shown that while the number of hurricanes – often called cyclones when they happen in the Pacific – may not increase drastically due to climate change, the events themselves appear to be getting stronger and more destructive. A storm is considered a hurricane when it reaches sustained winds of 74mph or more and is measured between category 1 and 5 on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale for severity.</p>

This intensification of storms, in which the energy and moisture held by a swirling hurricane is boosted by elevated heat from the ocean and atmosphere, has manifested itself in numerous recent disasters, including Hurricane Maria, a category 5 hurricane that reached 174mph and devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, and Hurricane Florence, a powerful category 4 storm that smashed into the US east coast a year later.

“While the attribution of individual tropical cyclone events remains difficult, there can be no doubt that climate change is creating more intense storms,” said Peter Pfleiderer, a scientist at the Berlin-based Climate Analytics, who led the study.

“Our results do not imply that increasing sea-surface temperatures lead to more tropical cyclones – but point towards a trend of more intense storms and therefore more extreme outcomes for seasons with many tropical cyclones.”

Separate research released this week found that climate breakdown is increasing the amount of rainfall that occurs during a major storm, as well as helping intensify the storm itself.

An analysis of the 2020 hurricane season, when a record 30 named storms stirred from the Atlantic, found that global heating heightened extreme rainfall over three-hour periods by 11% compared with what would be expected in pre-industrial times.

The study, which “hindcasted” the 2020 hurricane season with a computer model that showed what would have happened if climate change were not occurring, found that coastal communities are now at greater risk from deadly flooding from thunderous bursts of storm rainfall.

This sort of intensification caused more than 20 people to die from flooding, many of them while trapped in basement apartments, in New York and New Jersey in October when the remnants of Hurricane Ida, which had already ravaged New Orleans, still had the strength to travel across a broad sweep of the eastern US.

“You get a bigger climate signal with the more intense storms. With stronger wind speeds, you get more water evaporation and see this sort of flooding,” said Kevin Reed, a climate scientist at Stony Brook University who led the research, [published in Nature Communications](#).

“Climate change is often thought of as a distant problem but the reality is that climate change is here, our climate has changed and one of the clearest ways we can see that is through changes in extreme weather, such as hurricanes.

“As the world continues to warm, storms are going to get rainier and rainier. We are really going to have to get our act together in dealing with this.”

This year’s Atlantic hurricane season, which is [expected to be more active than usual](#), starts on 1 June and runs until 30 November.

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HEADLINE	04/14 Businesses size up losses on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-size-up-their-losses-on-russian-operations-11649928600?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>Global businesses are tallying up tens of billions in losses from their Russian operations as they grapple with the impact of asset sales, shutdowns and sanctions, according to public statements and securities filings.</p> <p>The cost to shareholders of Western companies’ exodus from Russia will become clearer in coming weeks, as companies make their first earnings announcements since the invasion of Ukraine.</p>

More than 600 Western companies have said they would exit or cut back operations in Russia, according to researchers at Yale University.

Losses stemming from the pullout include the expected write-down, or complete write-off, of assets ranging from oil wells to car factories and consumer loans, according to statements by the companies.

The impact will be felt well beyond the big announcements that have already come mostly from energy companies. A fifth of the companies in the S&P 500 listed Russia subsidiaries for 2021, according to data provider Calcbench.

The biggest hit so far is expected to come from British oil giant [BP PLC](#), which [faces a potential loss](#) of as much as \$25 billion from exiting its nearly 20% stake in Russian government-controlled oil producer [Rosneft](#).

At the other end of the scale, Swedish telecom company [Ericsson AB](#) this week made a provision of 900 million Swedish kronor, equivalent to around \$95 million, for asset-impairment and other costs stemming from the indefinite suspension of its Russian operations. An Ericsson spokeswoman declined to comment beyond the disclosure.

Russia-related impairments are likely to have the biggest impact on earnings of European companies, according to Carla Nunes, a managing director at risk-consulting firm Kroll LLC. “In the U.S., inflation and global supply-chain disruption are together likely to have a bigger impact,” she said.

The question of whether a company has to take a Russia-related earnings hit depends partly on whether it is disposing of assets, mothballing them, or just stopping sales in Russia, according to John McInnis, an accounting professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

Under international and U.S. accounting rules, decisions about whether to impair an asset are based on its expected value over its lifetime. For assets that are being idled temporarily, that may mean companies “could ride out for quite some time” without taking impairments, Mr. McInnis said.

[McDonald’s](#) hasn’t said whether it will take an accounting charge related to the closure of its 847 restaurants in Russia. Russia and Ukraine together contributed around 9% of the company’s \$23 billion global revenue last year. The burger chain has said the closures are temporary and it is keeping its 62,000 employees in Russia on the payroll. McDonald’s didn’t respond to requests for comment.

“Companies are always reluctant to take a hit to the bottom line,” said D. Larry Crumbley, an accounting professor at Texas A&M University

Some companies are disposing of their Russian assets, rather than waiting. [Heineken NV](#) and [Carlsberg A/S](#), the world’s second- and third-largest global brewers respectively, said last month [intend to exit Russia entirely](#). Carlsberg, among the Western companies with the biggest exposure to Russia, said its Russian business will be treated as an asset awaiting sale and reassessed at its fair value. That will result in a substantial noncash impairment charge, the Danish brewer said. Its Dutch rival Heineken said its exit would result in a one-time €400 million (\$435.3 million) charge.

Asset values are depressed in Russia, and companies might struggle to find a buyer for their business or joint-venture investment, or be forced to sell for a knockdown price, according to analysts.

French bank [Société Générale SA](#) this week said its income would decline by more than \$3 billion after it sells its stake in lender Rosbank and its Russian insurance units to one of the country’s richest people. Société Générale didn’t disclose how much it is selling Rosbank for. But the French bank said the disposals would lead to a roughly €2 billion (\$2.18 billion) write-off of the net book value of the sold assets, and a one-off noncash charge of about €1.1 billion. A company spokeswoman declined to comment beyond the previous disclosure.

Return to Top	<p>Oil-and-gas companies that have pledged to exit Russia typically are preparing to write off the entire value of their assets. Exxon Mobil intends to exit its 30% stake in a massive oil-and-gas project it runs on Sakhalin Island in Russia's Far East. Depending on the terms of the exit, Exxon may have to write off the full \$4 billion book value of the stake, the Texas company said in a securities filing this month.</p> <p>Energy giant Shell PLC is going further. The London-listed company expects to book \$4 billion to \$5 billion of accounting charges related to its exit from its Russia operations, including joint ventures with energy giant Gazprom PJSC. That is more than the roughly \$3 billion noncurrent book value of those assets. The earnings hit could include potential knock-on costs from the exit, such as expected credit losses, in subsequent quarters, Shell said.</p> <p>Companies that have to take a financial hit on Russian disposals may try to include as many potential losses as they can in the write-down, accounting professor Mr. Crumbley said. This "kitchen sink" approach opens the door to a potential future bump in earnings, should the losses in practice prove less severe than the company has made provisions for.</p> <p>"Any time you have a company that has a major loss, it's going to try and make the loss larger in that year, so the next year will [potentially] be better," Mr. Crumbley said.</p> <p>Russia-related write-downs will almost certainly extend beyond this round of earnings reports, with the level of future losses depending in part on whether the country's economy recovers later this year.</p> <p>Citigroup last month said that in a "severe stress" scenario, it could face nearly \$5 billion in losses in Russia, or almost half its \$10 billion exposure to the country. Executives at the New York bank said it was more likely that losses would be a lot less than that.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Russia Black Sea flagship abandoned
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-black-sea-fleet-flagship-damaged-evacuated-after-ukraine-claims-missile-strike-11649920914?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—The flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, the missile cruiser Moskva, was seriously damaged and abandoned by its crew after its ammunition blew up, Russia's Defense Ministry said. Ukrainian officials and a person close to Russia's Defense Ministry said Ukraine hit the warship with cruise missiles and sank it.</p> <p>Moskva's entire crew, which usually numbers some 500 sailors, was rescued after a fire that led to the explosion, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement carried by state news agencies. It didn't say what caused the fire.</p> <p>Moskva and other Russian ships in the Black Sea have been used to fire cruise missiles at Ukrainian cities since the war began on Feb. 24, targeting infrastructure, fuel depots, military bases and civilian administrative buildings across the country.</p> <p>Maksym Marchenko, the governor of Ukraine's coastal region of Odessa, said on social media that the Moskva was hit by Neptune missiles, which Ukraine developed and said earlier this year would be deployed by April. This would represent the first known use by Kyiv of the Neptune, an extension of the Soviet-designed KH-35 missile that has a range of 200 miles and can be launched from truck-based platforms. There was no independent confirmation of the type of weapons used.</p> <p>"It's a hugely important military event and the biggest defeat of the Russian Navy since World War II," Ukraine's presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych wrote on social media. The alleged sinking of the cruiser, he added, is particularly important because Moskva is Russian for Moscow, and because it would be the biggest warship by tonnage sunk since 1945.</p>

Ukraine's demonstrated ability to hit Russian warships makes it much harder, if not outright impossible, for Moscow to launch an amphibious assault on Odessa, Ukraine's main port, military analysts say.

Ukraine last month successfully hit another Russian warship, the large landing ship Saratov, in [a missile attack](#) on the occupied Azov Sea port of Berdyansk. That ship caught fire and sank, according to satellite images, with the attack frustrating Russia's plans to use Berdyansk as a logistics hub for its [military offensive in southeastern Ukraine](#). Russia never officially acknowledged that attack.

The claimed attack on Moskva on Wednesday night would represent the first time that a Russian warship at sea was hit by Ukraine's defenders, a strike that could change how the rest of the Russian navy operates in the Black Sea. The U.K. and other countries have recently promised to bolster Ukraine's coastal defenses with additional antiship missile capabilities.

Moskva led the Russian naval group that seized Ukraine's Snake Island at the beginning of the war. According to Kyiv, its Ukrainian defenders refused an ultimatum to surrender, broadcasting the reply that is now emblazoned on countless billboards across Ukraine and has become a symbol of the country's resistance: "Russian military ship, go screw yourself." Moscow disputes this version of events and says the Ukrainian troops on the island surrendered.

The claimed strike on Moskva came as Russian and Ukrainian forces exchanged artillery fire in the country's east after Moscow's attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, failed. Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) said this week that peace talks with Kyiv had [reached a dead end](#).

Russia is redeploying troops from around the Kyiv area to southern and eastern Ukraine, where it made early gains in the first weeks of [the invasion](#). Ukraine has used the lull in fighting to boost appeals to the West for more weapons and [sanctions on Russia](#) as several European leaders visited Kyiv on Wednesday.

The Biden administration said Wednesday it would [expand the intelligence](#) it is providing to Ukraine's forces and send \$800 million in additional weapons to Kyiv, including artillery, armored personnel carriers and helicopters, to help Ukrainian forces hold off what is expected to be a major Russian offensive in the eastern part of the country.

In a video posted on [Twitter](#) Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged leaders around the world to supply his country with more weapons to stop Russian forces.

"We need heavy artillery, armored vehicles, air defense systems and combat aircrafts. Anything to repel Russian forces and stop their war crimes," Mr. Zelensky said.

Russia late on Wednesday said it had taken control of the sea port in Mariupol; Ukraine hasn't confirmed the move. Russia's Defense Ministry also warned that any Ukrainian attacks against objects on Russian territory would be met with Russian strikes against "centers of decision-making" in cities including Kyiv.

Russian troops shelled civilian targets in the northeastern city of Kharkiv and the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, which has become [a center for refugees](#) from Mariupol, Ukraine's General Staff said.

Russian focus on Mariupol has remained steady as forces have worked to establish full control over the city to establish a land corridor from occupied regions in the east to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Earlier this week troop movements in the city centered on Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade, the fate of which was unclear after conflicting accounts between officials in Moscow and Kyiv.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said the unit had managed to break out of Russian encirclement in the city to join another Ukrainian unit, the Azov regiment, which has been fighting off Russian attacks on Azovstal for weeks. Ukrainian media on Tuesday cited an unnamed officer of the brigade as saying that several hundred of its members had managed to escape.

In a post to its [Facebook](#) page on April 11, the brigade said it had all but run out of ammunition despite promises from officials and was collapsing under the strain of Russia's offensive.

On Wednesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said 1,026 service members of the brigade, including 162 officers, had surrendered to Russian forces. Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 151 wounded servicemen had been taken to the Mariupol city hospital.

Gen. Konashenkov also said that Russian aviation had struck 46 military targets Tuesday, including a radar station near the village of Borovoe in the Kharkiv region and two Ukrainian weapons depots in the Zhytomyr and Kyiv regions. He said four Ukrainian helicopters had been destroyed at a military airfield in the Poltava region in the eastern part of the country.

After authorities in Kyiv said they are investigating allegations that Russia used chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops in Mariupol, the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the U.S. was also looking into these accusations.

"This is a scenario we have been concerned about for some time and repeatedly warned the world about," said Ambassador Michael Carpenter. "We must now urgently gather the evidence to ensure there is accountability for what could well be another war crime in Ukraine."

The Russian government hasn't commented publicly about the alleged use of chemical weapons in Mariupol.

International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan met with Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova on Wednesday in Kyiv, where the two discussed closer coordination to [investigate potential war crimes](#).

The OSCE released a report Wednesday saying that those who ordered and carried out attacks on a maternity hospital and a theater being used as a bomb shelter were guilty of such crimes.

"Violations concerning even the most fundamental human rights...have been committed, mostly in the areas under the effective control of Russia or entities under overall control of Russia," the report said. The Austria-based security organization added that some violations have been found on the Ukrainian side, but that violations committed by the Russians were more extreme and widespread.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Ukraine military success: NATO training
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-military-success-years-of-nato-training-11649861339?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>When Ukrainian National Guard Lt. Andriy Kulish ambushes Russian forces, he thanks the Canadian army.</p> <p>The Canadians trained Lt. Kulish's Rapid Response Brigade last summer in urban warfare, field tactics and battlefield medicine. The exercise in western Ukraine was one of the many in recent years with troops from Canada, the U.K., Romania and the California National Guard.</p> <p>This was just one piece of a little-publicized effort by countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that transformed Ukraine's military up and down the ranks, from foot soldiers to the defense ministry to overseers in parliament. It is one big reason why Ukraine's nimble fighting force has surprised the world by fending off a much larger and better-equipped invading army, say Ukrainians and their Western advisers.</p> <p>Through classes, drills and exercises involving at least 10,000 troops annually for more than eight years, NATO and its members helped the embattled country shift from rigid Soviet-style command structures to Western standards where soldiers are taught to think on the move.</p>

In confounding Russian invaders today, Lt. Kulish says his comrades-in-arms “are definitely using procedures they learned during the training with NATO.”

The Western assistance, while never secret, wasn’t trumpeted to avoid riling Russia. It also remained low-key because it was a valuable source of intelligence for the U.S. and its allies. Ukraine has been fighting a shooting war with Russian-backed separatists in parts of its east for years, meaning Kyiv fields some of Europe’s most battle-hardened soldiers. Their front-line experience made them sponges for NATO training—and offered NATO commanders a window into [what it would be like to fight Russia](#), say Western officers involved in the programs.

By the time Russia invaded on Feb. 24, training of Ukrainian forces had become so extensive that, although at least eight NATO countries participated, much of the hands-on training was being done by Ukrainian instructors. To NATO commanders, that was a sign Ukraine had internalized their teachings.

“The lesson learned is that support and help over many years had a significant impact,” says NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

NATO’s work in Ukraine was also more successful than comparable Western efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Advisers credit this to Ukraine’s relatively cohesive society and a recognized central government supported by bureaucracies that, while often inefficient and plagued with corruption, still embodied a unified state. Perhaps most significant, Ukraine had a clear foreign enemy to fight following Russia’s 2014 seizure of the Crimean Peninsula and military support for a rebellion in the country’s east.

Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#), in launching his invasion of Ukraine, cited the country’s possible membership in NATO as a reason for attacking. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has since proposed renouncing that ambition. Whatever the outcome, say Ukrainians and Western advisers, Kyiv’s forces have learned to wage war along NATO’s rules, and are showing it with battlefield successes.

Ukraine’s skirmishing units are the spearhead of a completely rebuilt military establishment. NATO advisers brought with them concepts novel to Ukraine’s Soviet-style force including civilian control of the military, professional inspectors, external auditors and logistics specialists.

Abandoning the emphasis on numbers of soldiers and weapons, NATO advisers instilled the concept of capacity building, where commanders set goals and ensure they have troops and weapons needed to achieve them.

To advance the approach, NATO introduced the idea of noncommissioned officers: experienced soldiers promoted to ranks of authority who serve as vital links between top brass and ground troops. NATO countries also helped Ukrainian military leaders adopt an approach called mission command, where higher-ups set combat goals and devolve decision-making as far down the chain of command as possible, even to individual soldiers.

In the Soviet approach, still widely used by Russia, senior officers give orders that foot soldiers have little room to discuss or adapt.

“That made a big, big difference,” says former defense minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk. “NCO reform and mission command raise the effectiveness of your forces by many times.”

Lt. Kulish says the training is doubly effective because Ukrainians know Soviet military thinking.

“The Russians are using their typical tactics, which haven’t much changed since Stalin’s times,” he says. First comes artillery salvos. “Then they throw loads of meat to take our positions,” he says, referring to Russian soldiers. The Ukrainians, in contrast, are unpredictable and agile. “We bring chaos to their ranks,” he says.

The work to develop those skills began inauspiciously in 2008. Russia had invaded Georgia, prompting NATO to extend to it and Ukraine vague invitations for membership. The alliance drafted a 70-page action plan spelling out “Ukraine’s strategic course of Euro-Atlantic integration,” essentially a road map for Kyiv to meet NATO’s democratic standards, including a more professional, civilian-controlled military. Those efforts gained little traction due to weak support in the West and resistance within Ukraine’s still-Soviet-style military.

Russia’s routing of Ukrainian forces in 2014 jolted Kyiv. Then-President Petro Poroshenko ordered a military transformation, energizing the NATO effort. Western officers focused their attention on a 150-square-mile military training facility in the city of Yavoriv, 10 miles east of Ukraine’s border with Poland, which itself had transformed into a postcommunist leader within the alliance.

In a sign of how significant the Yavoriv center eventually became, [Russia in mid-March targeted it with a missile strike](#), killing 35 people.

The first priority in 2014 was helping Ukrainian troops fight Russian proxies in the east. NATO launched courses in battlefield medicine, civil emergency planning and countering Russian hybrid warfare, from drones to phone-hacking. Western officers began drilling Ukrainian National Guard troops in modern combat tactics, prompting Ukrainian army officials to request similar training, recalls a senior U.S. defense official.

In Kyiv, government officials worked with NATO advisers to prepare deeper changes. Advisers from the U.S., U.K. and other NATO countries explained that to make Ukraine’s military more effective, its entire management had to change.

Advisers found problems at all levels, such as parallel military and civilian medical systems that required an act of parliament to be permitted to cooperate, recalls retired Col. Liam Collins, a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer.

U.S. officials repeated defense department mantras, like “It’s not the plan, it’s the planning.”

When Soviet-trained officers and bureaucrats resisted changes, advisers tried to work around them, says Kristopher Reeves, a Canadian army colonel who led his country’s branch of the training from 2017 to 2018.

“We focused on leaders who could use our energy and multiply it,” says Col. Reeves.

By the time he left, training sessions at Yavoriv had grown from companies of 150 soldiers to battle groups entailing more than 400 troops. Ukrainians began replacing Western soldiers in leading combat simulations.

“The second-best thing to being in combat is teaching it,” says Col. Reeves, of how militaries learn.

Annual exercises orchestrated at Yavoriv by the U.S. Army, dubbed Rapid Trident, let Ukrainian troops practice with forces from up to a dozen countries. Lt. Kulish, whose unit is now defending the city of Rubizhne, says skills including explosives handling and field tactics acquired at the exercises since 2016 helped his rapid reaction brigade fight in Donbas over recent years.

Soldiers rotating out of combat in Donbas could also apply their experience in exercises and often shared lessons with their mentors. Retired U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Timothy McGuire, who helped establish the Yavoriv center, in 2018 invited Ukrainian officers to observe big NATO exercises in Germany, where they watched a unit prepare a defensive position.

“I wouldn’t do it like that,” a Ukrainian general commented to Gen. McGuire, noting the troops weren’t properly camouflaged, well dispersed or sufficiently dug-in.

“It was great to see their awareness,” says Gen. McGuire. The conversation shifted to what the Ukrainians would do differently and later fed into an after-action review of the exercise.

Ukrainian troops using Western weapons to fight in the Donbas would also report back on their performance and how soldiers were integrating the arms into combat.

“It was definitely a two-way street,” says Col. Collins. “Without a doubt, we were learning from them at the same time they were learning from us.”

Away from battlegrounds, the advisers spent years pressing for the bureaucratic building blocks of a professional military, such as audit reports, professional development programs and personnel review processes—“slightly boring stuff,” says Col. Reeves. Over time, he says, selection of commanders became more meritocratic.

“Combat experience became more important than who has the biggest budget,” says Col. Reeves. “It’s not all unicorns and rainbows, but we could see how their promotion systems were being redesigned for the right reasons.”

The changes and civilian control brought layers of review that exposed corruption and waste, often sparking anger from officers and bureaucrats.

“It was kind of stressful because you were constantly creating problems,” recalls Mr. Zagorodnyuk, the former defense minister. Political will from Mr. Poroshenko and then President Zelensky kept efforts advancing.

Totalitarian states don’t have institutions empowered to challenge what the military says, Mr. Zagorodnyuk notes: “In Russia, nobody challenged the military.”

As threats from Russia increased last year, the pace of military training accelerated. British army Maj. Bill Ross, who was in charge of British land-based training in Ukraine from October until this February, raced to get Ukrainian troops comfortable using NLAW antitank missiles the U.K. was shipping over. A British infantry battalion that initially planned to instruct squads of 40 Ukrainians suddenly had groups of 80, with soldiers coming from across the country.

“We literally delivered those every three or four days, another course, another course, another course,” says Maj. Ross. The hope, he says, was that even if only a few hundred soldiers got trained directly, they could cascade the training to other troops. In weekly coordination meetings in Kyiv, helmed by a U.S. colonel, the Ukrainians and Western allies focused their training.

Internal opposition continued throughout. When Maj. Ross arrived at the Zhytomyr Military Institute southwest of Kyiv in October, initially he was denied access because of “an individual in their organization who did not want interference from Western troops,” he says. Eventually he reached a person who cleared his entry.

Maj. Ross’s team answered to Ukraine’s Joint Force Command, which had mapped out a defensive plan to thwart a Russian invasion. When he last saw the Ukrainian military’s slides outlining strategies in February, red arrows pointed into the country from all sides except the West. But the Ukrainians had a defensive plan.

“It was their plan,” says Maj. Ross. “We assisted.”

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HEADLINE	04/14 Caregivers confront dilemma: back-to-office
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/going-back-to-the-office-is-harder-when-youre-taking-care-of-mom-or-dad-11649895329?mod=hp_lead_pos10

Returning to the workplace presents special challenges for people caring for aging or infirm family members. Consider Wendy Gamba's recent Friday.

Ms. Gamba, a senior manager at a New Haven, Conn., foundation, was on the roof of her seven-story office building, talking with construction workers about a new air-conditioning unit when her cellphone rang. It was her mother, screaming.

Ms. Gamba, 46 years old, had recently returned to the office three days a week and hired a caregiver to help with her mom, who has dementia. Her mother didn't want the caregiver there and had thrown a plate at her.

[Family caregivers](#)—who make up 18% to 22% of the labor force, according to national surveys—are heading back to the workplace with a mix of fear, frustration and uncertainty as they attempt to resume office lives while managing care for loved ones.

Although many say they welcome a separation of work and home duties, caregivers often find themselves running home during lunch hours, installing surveillance cameras to see whether a parent has fallen and assembling new care arrangements at significant cost. Infecting sick or frail family members with Covid-19 remains a worry, but many are concerned that not going back to in-person work would harm their careers.

Pandemic work-from-home arrangements [gave many caregivers new flexibility](#). But they also created expectations of job-related night and weekend work, on top of everything else they are doing, says Jennifer Olsen, executive director of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers. The institute's recent [Invisible Overtime report](#) found that caregiving employees spend an average 20 hours a week on care duties on top of full-time jobs. Some people—those known as [the "sandwich generation"](#)—are taking care of children as well as older parents.

Caregivers, Ms. Olsen says, often feel obligated to work late hours to compensate for when they might need time off. They also worry that requesting a hybrid or flexible schedule could jeopardize their careers or be seen by co-workers as preferential treatment. And securing flexible arrangements can be more difficult for hourly or front-line workers, she says.

Members of Working Daughter, an online community of women juggling jobs and caregiving, are trying several approaches, says founder Liz O'Donnell. Some are going part-time, and others are trying to renegotiate the hours they spend in the office. One woman asked for shorter in-person days so she and her sister could split time at home with their father, says Ms. O'Donnell.

Frustrations are many, especially as companies are still figuring out how to differentiate in-person from remote work. "They're sitting in the office, with the door closed, on a Zoom, doing the same thing they could do at home," often while paying someone else to be at home, says Ms. O'Donnell.

Women, who are disproportionately caregivers, dropped out of the workforce at higher rates during the pandemic, a trend that only recently is appearing to turn. Anne Tumlinson, CEO of ATI Advisory, a consulting firm that specializes in care delivery for frail older adults and their families, says many remain on the sidelines. A recent report from the Federal Reserve shows that [elder care remains a drag on labor supply](#).

"It's really hard to work at all if you are caregiving," Ms. Tumlinson says, noting that she planned to work this winter when her father was severely ill, thinking she could help provide care and do her job. "It didn't work. We were all-hands-on-deck all the time."

The average caregiver is [a woman in her late 40s, but 23% are millennials](#), according to the 2020 Caregiving in the U.S. report by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. Millennials spend a greater share of their income on caregiving than older caregivers, and many are considering buying homes and starting families—goals that caregiving demands can throw off course.

Preserving some flexibility to work remotely has helped Bailey Pittenger, 32, care for her mother, Ann, who has early-onset dementia. A teacher in Winston-Salem, N.C., Ms. Pittenger can work from home in the afternoon and evenings, which allows her to take her mom to medical appointments and make care-related calls about billing and finances.

When she has to be on campus in the mornings, she relies on a “24/7 Team Ann” that she has assembled, consisting of live-in and hourly caregivers for her mother, who lives in an apartment five minutes away. Ms. Pittenger also depends on the support of her school’s dean and fellow co-workers, who can take over a class when arrangements fall through.

Stef Bell, 49, an administrative assistant for a law-enforcement agency, was working from home after the pandemic shut down offices. Shortly afterward, her 75-year-old mother, Mary, who lives with her, had a stroke that left her with severe aphasia and little ability to speak and comprehend. The elder Ms. Bell would wake up, say the same two words—“answer” and “question”—and repeat them throughout the day, interrupting Ms. Bell’s work.

“We were together all the time. By the end of December, I just broke,” says Ms. Bell.

Her bosses said she could work remotely, but she felt she had to go to the office to get any work done. Neither she nor her mom wanted in-home help, so Ms. Bell installed eight cameras throughout the house and compiled a binder with medical cards and instructions for emergency responders, alerting them that her mother has trouble communicating.

Ms. Gamba, the executive in New Haven, was responsible for developing a three-month pilot program to bring workers back to the workplace. Starting March 1, employees could work full-time in the office, spend two to four days there or work virtually.

As chief financial officer and vice president of operations, Ms. Gamba needs to be on site, so she works three days in the office and two at home. A caregiver comes to her mother’s house three days a week for five hours, to make her mother breakfast and lunch and to help with cleaning.

Since returning to the office, Ms. Gamba says she gets several calls from her mom asking why the caregiver is there, as well as calls from the caregiver saying her mother has locked her out. “With caregiving, things are unforeseen,” Ms. Gamba says.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Australia appeals to Solomon Is. on China
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-asks-solomon-islands-to-abandon-china-security-pact-11649854144?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>ADELAIDE, Australia—Australia made an 11th-hour attempt to scupper a planned security agreement between the Solomon Islands and China, urging the archipelago nation to lean on Pacific neighbors for its security needs.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Australian Minister for the Pacific Zed Seselja met with Solomon Islands officials, including Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, in the capital Honiara to request that they not proceed with a deal that could allow China to dock warships there. Two of Australia’s top intelligence officials met with Mr. Sogavare in Honiara last week.</p> <p>“We have asked Solomon Islands respectfully to consider not signing the agreement and to consult the Pacific family in the spirit of regional openness and transparency, consistent with our region’s security frameworks,” Mr. Seselja said.</p>

Mr. Sogavare couldn't be reached for comment. He recently told the country's Parliament that officials were ready to sign the pact with China, while rejecting criticism that it risked fueling tensions in the region.

A [draft of the security agreement](#) that circulated online last month alarmed the U.S. and Australia, among others, because it could allow China to dock vessels in the Solomon Islands and use its forces to protect the safety of Chinese citizens and major projects.

The Pacific region, which contains more than a dozen small island nations and territories, is a strategically important area. It has major shipping lanes and fisheries. It is also home to military bases of Western powers, such as in Guam, a remote U.S. territory.

Security experts say a pact between China and the Solomon Islands—home to about 690,000 people on a land area slightly smaller than the state of Maryland—could have far-reaching strategic implications, including raising the specter of heightened military tension in the Pacific.

Australia recently accused the Chinese navy of shining a military-grade laser at a surveillance plane, the latest escalation of tensions between the two nations over issues such as trade, cybersecurity and political interference.

Australian officials insist that Pacific nations should oversee the security needs of the region. Tom Udall, the U.S. ambassador to New Zealand, said on Wednesday he had a sense that Pacific countries were capable of handling their own security.

Security experts fear China could seek to build on any agreement. The Chinese Embassy in Australia didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Australia is especially concerned about the possible rotation of Chinese vessels in the Solomon Islands, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Tuesday. "That is a serious issue that we will continue to press," he told reporters.

The U.S. is concerned that the presence of China's security forces would fuel local, regional and international concerns over Beijing's military reach in the Pacific.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, visiting the region in February, said the U.S. plans to open an embassy in the Solomon Islands, part of a broader strategy to invest more deeply in the Pacific islands, Southeast Asia and South Asia.

Mr. Seselja's 24-hour visit to the Solomon Islands reflects Australia's continuing concern over the planned pact. After Mr. Morrison on Sunday called an election for next month, Australia's government entered a so-called caretaker period, during which it is unusual for ministers to travel abroad.

The Solomon Islands is pursuing a closer relationship with China because it doesn't expect traditional partners such as Australia to meet all of its security needs, Mr. Sogavare has said. The nation has no intention of stoking geopolitical struggles in the region and needs support in tackling major challenges, such as climate change, he said.

He highlighted violent protests in November that he said were an attempt to bring down his government and led to the burning of several buildings, including in districts of Honiara where recent Chinese migrants own businesses.

Australia [sent a peacekeeping force](#) of more than 100 federal police and defense personnel to help quell the unrest. A month later, the Solomon Islands accepted China's offer of riot equipment and six police liaison officers to train its own police force.

	<p>Mr. Sogavare said in an address to parliament last month that he felt the Solomon Islands was being “branded as unfit” to manage its own security arrangements, and that he found it insulting.</p> <p>Mr. Morrison said on Wednesday that he respects the sovereignty of the Solomon Islands. “What we have been doing is ensuring that they are fully aware of the risks and the security matters that are not only of concern to Australia, but islands, Pacific nations, across the Pacific,” he said.</p> <p>The Solomon Islands has no intention of asking China to build a military base in the country, a three-hour plane ride from Australia’s northeast coast, Mr. Sogavare said on March 29. Australia’s Mr. Seselja on Wednesday highlighted that statement and said it was welcomed by Australian officials.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Ominous rhetoric gains grounds in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/13/russias-war-ukraine-founders-ominous-rhetoric-gains-ground/
GIST	<p>RIGA, Latvia — After a month of fighting, the architects of Moscow’s war against Ukraine had to explain to Russians why Kyiv had not fallen. That’s when the most menacing rhetoric began.</p> <p>On state television, a military analyst doubled down on Russia’s need to win and called for concentration camps for Ukrainians opposed to the invasion.</p> <p>Two days later, the head of the defense committee in the lower house of parliament said it would take 30 to 40 years to “reeducate” Ukrainians.</p> <p>And on a talk show, the editor in chief of the English-language television news network RT described Ukrainians’ determination to defend their country as “collective insanity.”</p> <p>“It’s no accident we call them Nazis,” said Margarita Simonyan, who also heads the Kremlin-backed media group that operates the Sputnik and RIA Novosti news agencies. “What makes you a Nazi is your bestial nature, your bestial hatred and your bestial willingness to tear out the eyes of children on the basis of nationality.”</p> <p>Russia’s astonishing shift toward genocidal speech has been swift and seamless. Moscow officials stepped up warnings that Russia was fighting for its survival. Pundits condemned peace talks and scorned troops’ withdrawal from Kyiv and surrounding areas.</p> <p>The change of gears, signaling a brutal occupation, appeared deliberate and coordinated in a nation where detailed Kremlin orders on messaging are handed down regularly to state media.</p> <p>Eugene Finkel, an expert on genocide at Johns Hopkins University in Bologna, Italy, said the rhetoric isn’t just “a few crazy hard-liners” spouting off. It’s coming from prominent government officials, showing up in the press, being heard on state television — and is “clearly genocidal.”</p> <p>“They’re talking about destroying Ukrainians as a group, Ukraine as a state and as an identity community,” Finkel said. “The argument is we are going to destroy this national community as it exists and create something new that we like instead, no matter how many people we kill in the process.”</p> <p>In late March, the head of Russia’s Investigative Committee launched a probe into whether Ukrainian students’ textbooks “target children with hatred of Russia and the Russian language” and “distort history.” There already is evidence, Finkel noted, of Russian soldiers in Ukraine going through libraries and schools and destroying books in Ukrainian or those about the country’s history and struggle for independence.</p> <p>“I think there is a clear indication that [the Russians] are targeting quite deliberately everything and everyone that is associated with Ukrainians as a national identity,” he said.</p>

The chances that Russian President Vladimir Putin, a man with no history of reversing course when cornered, might back down as his military's effort faltered were never very great, and U.S. officials have questioned Russia's seriousness about peace talks. Yet after [Moscow's failure](#) to take Kyiv, the shift to a harder line in state media suggests that the Kremlin is girding the population for a tough and potentially long fight in Ukraine's east, one that could see even [greater destruction](#) and casualties.

It also hints at a punitive path should Russia win: potentially partitioning Ukraine, crushing its military and civil society, and occupying it for years.

A former Kremlin adviser, Sergei Karaganov, has said that the country would be left as a rump state — or perhaps as nothing at all — after Moscow is done. Russia, he made clear in an interview with the New Statesman, “cannot afford to lose.”

The threat of Nazism is one of the Kremlin's most brazen themes. Last week, RIA Novosti ran a prominent opinion piece by pundit Timofei Sergeitsev, an outspoken supporter of Putin, that urged the liquidation of the entire Ukrainian elite, the division of the country, destruction of its sovereignty and even the abolition of its name.

“Denazification will inevitably be de-Ukrainization,” Sergeitsev wrote, requiring years of ideological repression and severe censorship in political, cultural and educational fields. Ordinary Ukrainians were complicit and must suffer the “inevitable hardships of a just war” before total submission to Russian power “as a historical lesson and atonement for their guilt.”

Others quickly piled on. Former president and prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, who is now deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council, wrote on Telegram that “Ukrainianism, fueled by anti-Russian poison and all-consuming lies about its identity, is one big fake.”

Ruth Deyermond, a Russia expert in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, said such arguments are “hard to read in any other way than a justification for mass killing. It's extremely disturbing language and clearly has genocidal overtones. It's not that they, Ukrainians, have a Führer or a political ideology or a Nazi system. They're just Nazi.”

In a provincial city in central Russia, a young woman named Valeriya talked recently about how isolated she felt as the calls to “fight Nazis” increased. Valeriya, who declined to give her full name or where she lives because of safety concerns, said co-workers viewed her with suspicion because she has a Ukrainian boyfriend and opposes the invasion. They demanded she say whose side she was on.

“They tell me, ‘You don't know the reality. There are fascists, and we need to get rid of them,’ ” she said.

She has begun seeing social media posts in support of genocide and fears that the sentiment might intensify.

“In our country, we were brought up with the idea that we should fight Nazis,” Valeriya said. “If state television keeps calling for the continuation of war and to kill the last Ukrainian, then maybe ordinary people will start believing it and lots and lots of people will think that that's what we should do.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday that Russia was carrying out mass deportations. “Hundreds of thousands of people have already been deported,” he told Lithuania's Parliament during a virtual address. “They are placed in special filtration camps. Their documents are taken away from them. They are interrogated and humiliated. How many are killed is unknown.”

The Tass news agency reported last week that Russian officials said 674,000 Ukrainians had been moved to Russia — voluntarily, they claimed. Ukrainian officials' accusations about their treatment have been difficult to verify.

With the redeployment of Russian forces to eastern Ukraine, the rhetoric is likely to ratchet up further.

	<p>Less than two weeks before the invasion, Putin used a crude reference to express his determination to force Kyiv to accept Russia's terms for peaceful coexistence: "Like it or not, put up with it, my beauty," a term associated with rape for many Russians. Ukraine's resistance has only toughened the Kremlin's mood.</p> <p>Yet Finkel fears that a Russian victory would not only destroy Ukraine but upend the post-World War II global order.</p> <p>"That's something I have been thinking about a lot. I think it will be a pretty scary world," he said. "For Russia, it's a test of the idea that might makes right — and we have the power, so we can do whatever we want."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Texas offers deal end snarled border traffic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/texas-border-abbott-trucks.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas said on Wednesday that days of snarled traffic on the border, caused by new safety inspections he ordered last week, were part of a concerted effort to force Mexican officials to do more to stop the flow of migrants into the United States.</p> <p>Ratcheting up the stakes in a clash over immigration that has tangled trade routes into Texas, Mr. Abbott said he would end the inspections only at one entry point — the bridge between Laredo and the Mexican city of Colombia, Nuevo León — and only because the governor of that state had agreed to increase border security on the Mexican side.</p> <p>The Texas police, Mr. Abbott said, would continue to stop all trucks coming from other Mexican states for safety inspections, despite increasing pressure from truckers, business groups and officials from both parties who are calling for an end to the delays that have stretched for hours and even days and sharply limited commercial traffic.</p> <p>"Clogged bridges can end only through the type of collaboration that we are demonstrating today between Texas and Nuevo León," said Mr. Abbott, a two-term Republican up for re-election this year.</p> <p>The announcement marked a shift in Mr. Abbott's public description of the safety inspections he ordered last week, an acknowledgment that they were a means to exert political pressure, both on Mexican officials and on President Biden.</p> <p>"The goal all along has been to ensure that people understood the consequences of an open border and that Texas isn't going to tolerate it anymore," Mr. Abbott said.</p> <p>In a statement on Wednesday, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, called the inspections "unnecessary and redundant" and said that "the continuous flow of legitimate trade and travel and C.B.P.'s ability to do its job should not be obstructed," referring to blockages at Customs and Border Protection facilities. State police in Texas have established their vehicle safety checkpoints just beyond where trucks pass through federal inspection, creating the backups. Ms. Psaki said commercial traffic had declined by as much as 60 percent.</p> <p>The Mexican Foreign Ministry, in a statement, said that it opposed Mr. Abbott's actions and that Mexican officials had been in touch with Mr. Abbott and with federal officials to "find alternatives that ensure the security of our shared border without harming binational trade."</p> <p>The safety checks have applied to all commercial vehicles entering Texas at major commercial crossings, and in the days since they commenced, backups at the border have grown substantially.</p>

Businesses complain that they cannot get goods into Texas. Mexican truckers, facing daylong delays in sweltering heat without food or bathrooms, began to protest, and created blockades at crossings in the cities of Pharr and El Paso late Monday into Tuesday.

Even some Republican politicians, like the conservative agriculture commissioner, Sid Miller, urged Mr. Abbott to end the inspections, saying they were “increasing the cost of food and adding to supply chain shortages.”

And so on Wednesday, Mr. Abbott appeared in the border city of Laredo with the governor of the Mexican state of Nuevo León, Samuel Alejandro García Sepúlveda, and said that Texas would end the safety checks for trucks coming into Laredo, a crossing that serves a relatively limited area of the border. “The Texas Department of Public Safety can return to its previous policy” of random checks at that crossing, Mr. Abbott said.

Mr. García said that, in exchange, officials in his state had set up some checkpoints on the Mexican side of the crossing and promised that “our 14 kilometers of border with Texas will be continually patrolled with our police.” (The border between Texas and Mexico is 1,254 miles, or more than 2,000 kilometers.)

Mr. Abbott presented the decision as a victory, suggesting he had been able to reach an agreement with Mexican leaders in one state on border security, and promised to do so with others at well.

But that aim was never mentioned in Mr. Abbott’s rollout of the inspections last week. Instead, he had said the inspections were part of a broad response to the Biden administration’s announcement that it would be ending a Trump-era policy of turning back most migrants at the border under an emergency public health rule, known as Title 42.

Mr. Abbott on Wednesday urged Mr. Biden to maintain the public health policy, which is expected to end next month.

Another part of Mr. Abbott’s effort to pressure the Biden administration, also announced last week, has been to charter buses to take migrants released from federal custody into Texas and bring them to Washington or other locations outside of the state. The migrants went on a voluntary basis, state officials said.

On Wednesday, the first of the buses arrived in Washington, Mr. Abbott said in a statement, carrying two dozen migrants from Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. A second was on the way.

A camera crew from Fox News was on hand for the arrival of the first bus and captured images of the migrants as they exited near the Capitol, wearing masks and gripping manila envelopes.

Mr. Abbott and his political strategists have seen the border, and opposition to the Biden administration’s immigration policies, as a winning issue with voters, including many Democrats in Texas.

But the backups caused by the inspections, which industry experts said affected tens of millions of dollars in produce deliveries alone, provided a rare opening for Democrats to use the border against Mr. Abbott.

“It’s the wrong response to the problem of Title 42,” said Representative Henry Cuellar, a Democrat whose district includes Laredo. “All he’s done is delay the national supply chain. He’s affecting a lot of incomes here. The cost, it’s going to be passed on from the companies to the consumer.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 Russia tech industry faces ‘brain drain’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/technology/russia-tech-workers.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Technology

GIST

In early March, days after Russia invaded Ukraine and began cracking down on dissent at home, Konstantin Siniushin, a venture capitalist in Riga, Latvia, helped charter two planes out of Russia to help people flee.

Both planes departed from Moscow, carrying tech workers from the Russian capital as well as St. Petersburg, Perm, Ekaterinburg and other cities. Together, the planes moved about 300 software developers, entrepreneurs and other technology specialists out of the country, including 30 Russian workers from start-ups backed by Mr. Siniushin.

The planes flew south past the Black Sea to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, where thousands of other Russian tech workers fled in the weeks after the invasion. Thousands more flew to Georgia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and other countries that accept Russian citizens without visas.

By March 22, a Russian tech industry trade group estimated that between 50,000 and 70,000 tech workers had left the country and that an additional 70,000 to 100,000 would soon follow. They are part of a much larger exodus of workers from Russia, but their departure could have an even more lasting impact on the country's economy.

The exodus will fundamentally change the Russian tech industry, according to interviews with more than two dozen people who are part of the tightknit community of Russian tech workers around the world, including many who left the country in recent weeks. An industry once seen as a rising force in the Russian economy is losing vast swaths of its workers. It is losing many of the bright young minds building companies for the future.

"Most Russian tech workers are part of the global market. Either they work for global companies or they are tech entrepreneurs trying to build new companies for the global market," Mr. Siniushin said through an interpreter from his office in Riga. "So they are leaving the country."

The recent exodus reverses 10 to 15 years of momentum in the Russian tech industry, said Konstantin Sonin, an economist at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy, who immigrated from Russia to the United States. "It is now like the '90s, when whomever was able to move moved out of the country," he said.

Tech is a small part of the Russian economy compared with the energy and metals industries, but it has been growing rapidly. The loss of many young, educated, forward-looking people could have economic ramifications for years to come, economists said.

"The long-run impact may be more significant than the short-run impact," said Barry Ickes, head of the economics department at Pennsylvania State University, who specializes in the Russian economy. "Eventually, Russia has to diversify its economy away from oil and gas, and it has to accelerate productivity growth. Tech was a natural way of doing that."

Workers left the country because they objected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, no longer wanted to live under the Putin regime and feared they could not speak their minds if they remained. Working in tech, a comparatively lucrative industry, they had money to flee the country. And like other tech workers globally, they could continue their work from anywhere with a laptop and an internet connection.

Others left because their companies pulled them out.

After foreign governments imposed sanctions on Russia and many American and European companies stopped selling products there or barred access to banking and internet services, some Russian tech workers did not have the tools needed to do their work. Companies struggled to pay them.

Some worked for companies based in Russia and others for companies with headquarters elsewhere. Many start-ups in the United States and Europe — including many founded by Russian-born entrepreneurs — relied on software coders, engineers and other tech workers in Russia. To Russian entrepreneurs living

abroad, these workers were a known quantity, and they were not as expensive as specialists in Silicon Valley and other parts of the United States.

StudyFree, a San Francisco start-up that helps students find university scholarships and grants, employed about 30 workers in Russia, but keeping them there became a liability, so the company has moved them out, said Dasha Kroshkina, the company's Russian-born founder.

"We will not be able to attract as much funding if we still have employees in Russia," she said.

In March, a group that offered tips and other help for people moving from Russia to Yerevan on the internet messaging app Telegram swelled to as many as 18,000 members. During workdays, Russian tech workers filled coffee shops and other public spaces, and as they jockeyed for places to live, rent prices rose significantly, according to many who worked to find apartments through the Telegram group.

"We don't have enough quality apartments for highly educated people with high salaries and high standards," said Aram Shahbandarian, a former Google employee based in Yerevan who is helping many Russians move to the city. "Yerevan is cracking."

Vahan Kerobyan, Armenia's economy minister, said in an interview that as a country with a strategic relationship with Russia, it was not marketing itself as trying to pull companies out of Russia, but that if companies decided to move, it would work to accommodate them.

"The Armenian tech community is providing support to their Russian friends, and the government is very much worried about giving Russian companies a nice place that is not too expensive where they can work," he said. Mr. Kerobyan estimated that 43,000 people had moved from Russia to Armenia, half of whom hold Russian passports and half Armenian passports.

Miro, a U.S. software company, chartered flights to Yerevan for its Russian employees and moved them into two hotels in the heart of the city, Mr. Kerobyan said. X-tensive, a software development company in Russia, has also moved its employees to the Armenian city because its primary client, ServiceTitan, has an office there, he said.

Miro has said publicly that it was moving its workers out of Russia. X-tensive did not respond to a request for comment.

Many of those workers may eventually move on to other places because visa restrictions require them to leave their current home after a certain number of days. Many are unsure where they might go. Others are planning moves to up-and-coming tech hubs farther away, such as Dubai and Lisbon.

Artem Taganov, founder and chief executive of a Russian start-up called HintEd, said he knew about 70 founders of Russian companies who, like him, had fled to Armenia. If entrepreneurs stay in Russia, he said, their companies can serve only the local market.

"Before all this started, Russia had such a strong technology base," Mr. Taganov said. "Now, we have a brain drain that will continue for the next five to 10 years."

Russia has a tradition of producing talented software engineers and web developers. Noteworthy companies like Telegram and Yandex have come from the country. As sanctions cut the country off from the global economy, tech companies will have to take cues from China, a much larger country, where businesses have succeeded by catering to domestic customers.

The Russian government wants to keep tech workers in the country, offering lower tax rates, preferable mortgages and even the promise that they will not be conscripted into the army, according to state media. Last week, Mikhail V. Mishustin, the prime minister of Russia, called on Russian tech workers to create "our own ecosystem."

	<p>“The motherland gave you all you need to do your work,” Mr. Mishustin said in his annual address to Parliament. “You will be able to work reliably and calmly for your country, for your company, earn normal money and live here comfortably.”</p> <p>Many will remain in Russia working for state-affiliated companies. But they will face other obstacles.</p> <p>They may have to rebuild many of the fundamental tools needed to construct modern software and internet services. Crucial computer hardware may become harder to find as sanctions limit availability.</p> <p>Stepan Pachikov, considered by many to be one of Russia’s first successful tech entrepreneurs after he built Paragraph International, a company that made handwriting software for Apple machines, said that the smartest tech workers had been leaving the country for years but that the pace was accelerating.</p> <p>As Mr. Pachikov has watched Russia become economically isolated from the world and more restrictive at home, he has little optimism about the future. “It’s devastating,” he said. “If you lose too much blood, it is death for the body. Russia has lost a lot of blood.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 School during war for Ukraine’s children
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/europe/ukraine-schools-war.html
GIST	<p>KRAKOW, Poland — Across Ukraine, kindergartens have been bombed, elementary schools have been converted into shelters and in some cities like Mariupol, their grounds have even become makeshift graveyards.</p> <p>As the war tears at the social institutions of the country, education has been one of the major casualties. Parents, teachers and school administrators are scrambling to provide classes for the 5.5 million school-age children who remain in the country, as well as for thousands of others who have fled to other countries.</p> <p>In many places, students are connecting with their normal classrooms online, if their hometown schools are still operating and they have access to the internet. But with such vast displacement of teachers and students, the paths to learning are circuitous: In some cases, teachers who relocated within Ukraine are instructing students who have already fled the country, through a school system that they both left behind.</p> <p>“The study is just like during the Covid times but with constant interruptions for the air sirens,” said Inna Pasichnyk, 29, who fled with her 11-year-old son, Volodymyr, to the Czech Republic from their home in the Donetsk region. He still dials into his classroom every day.</p> <p>Alla Porkhovnyuk now teaches classes remotely to 11- to 13-year-olds after fleeing with her children from the port town of Yuzhne, near Odesa, to stay with relatives in central Ukraine. As well as teaching history, much of her job involves providing reassurance to the children amid fears about the war.</p> <p>“They often ask when will the war end, when will they return to school?” she said. “I always smile and say that it will be soon — we have to be patient a little longer.”</p> <p>Millions of children and teachers have been forced to flee their homes since the Russian invasion began in February. Some end up elsewhere in Europe as refugees and join classrooms in unfamiliar countries and in unfamiliar languages. Some have taken advantage of initiatives by Ukraine’s ministry of education that allow them to continue their studies online while sheltering abroad — even if it is not through their own school district.</p> <p>More than 13,000 schools have instituted remote learning, and a few dozen have a blend of in-person and online learning. There are nearly 1,100 schools in areas where the educational process has been suspended entirely because the security situation is so tense, officials said.</p>

Many classrooms across Ukraine are simply unusable, after being damaged or destroyed, or used in some areas for military purposes.

“Sadly, in Ukraine, schools continue to come under attack,” said Joe English, a communications specialist from UNICEF who has spent time in Ukraine during the war.

In times of war, classrooms can and should provide children with a sense of stability and act as a safe space to learn and to process the trauma, Mr. English said.

Ms. Pasichnyk and her son had been living in Kramatorsk, a city in the east that was the site of a devastating attack on a train station last week. When the war began, they fled their home in a rush, and Ms. Pasichnyk said she did not even remember how she packed her bag or what was in it.

“But Volodymyr even managed to take a pencil case and a notebook,” she said of her son. After they relocated and got settled, he restarted his education over video call.

When the air-raid siren starts, those still in the city have to take shelter, she said, and lessons can get derailed.

“Of course, this is not the same schooling as in the days before the fighting in our city,” Ms. Pasichnyk said, but she is happy that her son is at least getting back into a regular routine.

Ms. Porkhovnyuk, the history teacher, hopes to return home soon, but for now, she logs on daily to teach her classes. Around one-third of her students are still in Yuzhne, she said, while the rest have moved abroad or to safer parts of the country.

Classes were canceled there for several weeks, but resumed online in mid-March, she said. The classes have been cut to just 30 minutes, and students are not given any homework or tests. Her focus is less on imparting new knowledge and more on distracting the children from the war, Ms. Porkhovnyuk said.

“My students are constantly forced to hide in basements and bomb shelters,” she said. “It is impossible to get used to it.”

Olena Yurchenko, 24, who teaches 10- and 11-year-olds at a private school in Kyiv, the capital, said classes resumed online at the end of March. She said she was nervous for the first class, because she did not know if all of her students were safe.

“But the biggest fear was how to answer all the questions that children could ask,” Ms. Yurchenko said, like when the war would be over, would their families be safe, or what would happen in Kyiv. “They were more scared and confused than the adults.”

She has found it difficult mentally and emotionally to adjust to teaching again.

“It’s as if I’m setting up a barrier within myself and completely separating myself from the war and the news, in order to provide quality material for children and give the tenderness and empathy that I’m sure children really need right now,” she said.

While some schools have avoided the worst of the war, others have been caught up in the fighting, becoming the scenes of horror themselves.

As of Monday, more than 900 educational institutions have been damaged or in some cases completely destroyed by bombing and shelling, according to Ukraine’s Ministry of Education and Science.

In some cities in the east that are fully occupied by Russian forces, the Ukrainian authorities have reported disputes over what schools can teach, as the Russian authorities push for schools to overhaul

their Ukrainian curriculums and instead teach in line with Russian schools. Some of these areas have large ethnic Russian populations.

Russian forces, for instance, detained the head of the education department in the occupied city of Melitopol, the mayor there said in late March, after educators pushed back against orders to change the curriculum.

The mayor, Ivan Fedorov, said in a video that Russian forces were trying to impose a shift in what schools taught, demanding that schools return to in-person classes that are taught in Russian.

“The occupiers go to schools, kindergartens and force our teachers and educators to resume the educational process using an incomprehensible Russian program,” Mr. Fedorov said in the video.

Students in the city have continued classes online, but local officials have stressed that it was too dangerous for children to return to the classroom. Melitopol, in a key stretch of southeastern territory between Russia-annexed Crimea and areas controlled by separatists in the east, has been occupied by Russian forces since the early days of the invasion.

Late last month, school directors across the city penned letters of resignation in opposition to the Russian orders, Mr. Fedorov said. But on Monday, the new local government installed by Russian forces said it planned to reopen schools, according to Russian state television. It is unclear if that happened, and Mr. Fedorov said local teachers were not cooperating.

Eight years of war with Russia-backed separatists had already taken its toll on Ukraine’s east. More than 750 schools in the region had been destroyed, damaged or forced to close even before the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24.

Save the Children, an international charity focused on bettering children’s lives, has warned that attacks on schools and other education facilities are a grave violation against children and can constitute a war crime.

Ms. Yurchenko, the private school teacher in Kyiv, hopes that the war will not drag on and that she and her students can return to their normal routines soon.

“But I am sure that for both children and adults, it will not be the same,” she said. “We have all changed — the children have grown up in front of our eyes.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 US more weapons, security aid to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/politics/biden-weapons-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States will send an additional \$800 million worth of military and other security aid to Ukraine and step up intelligence sharing, American officials announced on Wednesday, as Russian forces appeared to be preparing for a new offensive in the country’s east.</p> <p>President Biden promised that the assistance would include more of the weapons that the United States has previously given Ukraine, as well as new capabilities. The expanded intelligence sharing will make available more information about Russian troops in Crimea and the eastern Donbas region, parts of the country that Russia and Russian-backed separatists have occupied since 2014 or 2015.</p> <p>Mr. Biden delivered the news about the arms package to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine during a nearly hourlong telephone call on Wednesday, according to White House officials. It came as the United States is considering whether to send a high-level official to Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, as another sign of support, according to a person familiar with the internal discussions.</p>

In a statement, Mr. Biden vowed to continue efforts to assist Ukraine, which has been pummeled by Russian artillery over the past month.

“As I assured President Zelensky, the American people will continue to stand with the brave Ukrainian people in their fight for freedom,” Mr. Biden said.

The issue of what military assistance to send Ukraine, and how fast to send it, has taken on greater urgency as the war has become a series of grinding battles between the Ukrainian and Russian armies. Mr. Zelensky has pleaded for more sophisticated weapons from the United States and its allies.

The Biden administration has responded with antitank weapons, including Javelin missiles, and other weapons that Ukrainian soldiers have used to repel Russian forces, especially in the north of the country. The United States has so far resisted helping Ukraine acquire fighter jets and other weaponry that could be used against targets inside Russia.

Mr. Biden said on Wednesday that the additional aid for Ukraine would include more sophisticated weaponry, such as artillery systems and armored personnel carriers.

Top Pentagon officials met with the leaders of the largest U.S. military contractors on Wednesday to discuss the flow of arms to Ukraine and what additional capabilities would help the country defend itself.

But the United States is also looking at advanced weapons in European stockpiles that Ukrainian troops already know how to use.

Mr. Biden said the United States would transfer additional helicopters as well, though he did not indicate whether they would come directly from the United States or from another country. The United States previously provided Ukraine with five Russian-designed Mi-17 helicopters that the Afghan military had once used.

The United States is also providing 18 155-millimeter howitzers, the first time it has sent that weapon to Ukraine, and 40,000 artillery rounds.

Last week, Slovakia agreed to send Ukraine a Soviet-era S-300 air defense system after the United States committed to positioning a more modern Patriot system in Slovakia. The United States has also helped European countries transfer Russian-designed T-72 tanks to Ukraine.

Russian forces failed to take Kyiv after trying for several weeks and now appear to be regrouping in eastern Ukraine, including in the Donbas region. Western officials say they expect the Kremlin to mount a major offensive there.

Independent analysts have said that Russia hopes to destroy Ukraine’s army and then might attack Kyiv from the south. European intelligence officials said President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia wanted to make significant battlefield gains ahead of May 9, when he is set to deliver an annual speech commemorating the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II.

John F. Kirby, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said the latest weapons shipment approved by Mr. Biden would be sent to Ukraine as soon as possible.

“We’re aware of the clock,” he said at a news conference on Wednesday. “And we know time is not our friend.”

As the conflict in Ukraine has evolved, intelligence agencies have adjusted their approach to ensure officials have flexibility “to share detailed, timely intelligence with the Ukrainians,” a U.S. intelligence official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the handling of classified material.

Biden administration officials have said they have been giving Ukraine the most relevant information at any given moment. Still, the administration has been reluctant to help the Ukrainians target Russian forces in Russia, and Republican lawmakers said that concern by the administration had extended to Russian forces in Crimea and the Donbas.

The stepped-up intelligence sharing was reported earlier by The Wall Street Journal.

U.S. officials have defended their intelligence sharing with Ukraine. On Tuesday, Kathleen H. Hicks, the deputy secretary of defense, said that “the intelligence support that we have provided has been vital” and that the information given to Ukraine had been “high-end.” A U.S. official said the previous restrictions did not have a practical effect on the conflict.

Other officials said that as the Russian military shifted its strategy away from the attack on Kyiv to reinforcing the operations in the Donbas, U.S. intelligence agencies began to look at whether their guidance on what information could be shared needed to be expanded.

Republicans have been critical of the Pentagon and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, saying they have failed to provide enough information to Ukraine about the Russian forces and separatist groups that have been stationed in parts of Ukraine since 2014 or 2015.

In a letter released on Monday, Senate Republicans said they were concerned that not enough was being done to share critical intelligence with Ukrainians. The letter, from Senator Marco Rubio of Florida and others, specifically referred to providing intelligence to the Ukrainians to help them “retake every inch of Ukraine’s sovereign territory, which includes Crimea and the Donbas.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 US expands intelligence sharing w/Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/europe/us-russian-troops-donbas-intelligence-sharing-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>The United States has increased the flow of intelligence to Ukraine about Russian forces in the Donbas and Crimea, as Kyiv’s military forces prepare to defend against a renewed offensive by Moscow in the country’s east, American officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The information could allow the Ukrainians to conduct more effective counterattacks against Russian forces in the Donbas or Crimea, or better predict the movement of Russian troops from those areas against Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>After several weeks of failing to take Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, Russian forces retreated from around the city and have been regrouping in Ukraine’s east, including the Donbas region. Western officials say they expect the Kremlin to mount a major offensive there.</p> <p>As the conflict in Ukraine has evolved, intelligence agencies have adjusted their approach to ensure officials have flexibility “to share detailed timely intelligence with the Ukrainians,” a U.S. intelligence official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the handling of classified material.</p> <p>The United States has adjusted its flow of intelligence since the war began, and administration officials have said they have been giving Ukraine the most relevant information at any given moment. Still, the Biden administration has been reluctant to help the Ukrainians target Russian forces in Russia, and Republican lawmakers said that concern has extended to Russian forces in Crimea and the Donbas.</p> <p>The stepped-up intelligence sharing was earlier reported by The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>U.S. officials have defended the intelligence sharing with Ukraine. On Tuesday, Kathleen H. Hicks, the deputy secretary of defense, said that “the intelligence support that we have provided has been vital.” And she said the information given to Ukraine had been “high end.”</p>

Other officials said that as the Russian military shifted its strategy away from their attack on Kyiv to reinforcing operations in the Donbas, U.S. intelligence agencies began to look at whether their guidance on what information could be shared needed to be expanded, and changed that guidance earlier in April.

Republicans have been critical of the Pentagon and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, saying they have failed to provide enough information to Ukraine about Russian forces stationed in parts of eastern and southern Ukraine that those forces and Russian-backed separatist groups have occupied since 2014 and 2015.

[In a letter released on Monday](#), Senate Republicans said they were concerned that not enough was being done to share critical intelligence with Ukrainians. The letter, from Senator Marco Rubio and others, specifically made reference to providing intelligence with the Ukrainians to help them “retake every inch of Ukraine’s sovereign territory, which includes Crimea and the Donbas.”

Russia seized the Black Sea territory of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, and armed Russian-backed separatists began claiming parts of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions, collectively known as the Donbas.

Last week, Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, questioned Lloyd J. Austin III, the secretary of defense, about whether the United States was providing enough intelligence to the Ukrainians to help them retake territory in the Donbas occupied in 2015, before the current invasion.

“Part of what you’ve heard from both parties in this committee is that as much as we have done, we’re still engaged in too many half measures,” Mr. Cotton said. “There’s still too much hesitancy and tentativeness in our posture toward this war.”

Mr. Austin said that the government was updating its intelligence-sharing guidance to make sure intelligence on the Russian-occupied Donbas areas could be provided. “The current guidance was not clear in that regard, so we’ll make sure it’s clear,” Mr. Austin said.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Tensions: Mich. officer kills unarmed Black
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/grand-rapids-police-shooting-michigan-patrick-lyoya.html
GIST	<p>The police in Grand Rapids, Mich., released videos on Wednesday showing a white officer fatally shooting Patrick Lyoya, a 26-year-old Black man, after a struggle during a traffic stop last week.</p> <p>The officer, who has not been named, was lying on the back of Mr. Lyoya before he appeared to shoot him in the head. In the seconds before the shooting, Mr. Lyoya and the officer wrestled on the ground and seemed to be fighting for control of the officer’s Taser.</p> <p>“When I saw the video, it was painful to watch,” Mark Washington, the Grand Rapids city manager, said. “And I immediately asked, ‘What caused this to happen, and what more could have been done to prevent this from occurring?’”</p> <p>Even before the release of the footage, the case exposed longstanding tensions in Grand Rapids, a city of about 200,000 people where 18 percent of residents are Black. Activists aired their frustration and grief on Tuesday night during a City Commission meeting, speaking for hours about what they described as years of inaction on policing issues by Grand Rapids leaders, and then protested through the evening on Wednesday after the videos were released.</p> <p>The investigation into the officer’s actions was ongoing, officials said on Wednesday, and no charging decision had been made. Chief Eric Winstrom of the Grand Rapids police said he was not aware of any weapons other than the officer’s gun and Taser being found at the scene. Police body camera video shows the officer telling Mr. Lyoya that he is pulling him over because his license plates do not match his car.</p>

[A New York Times investigation](#) last fall revealed that American police officers, over the previous five years, had killed more than 400 motorists who were not wielding a gun or knife or under pursuit for a violent crime. The Times found that police culture and court precedents significantly overstated the danger to officers at vehicle stops.

Police killings of Black men have dominated national discussions about law enforcement in recent years, particularly after the [murder of George Floyd](#) by a Minneapolis police officer in 2020 touched off protests across the country, including in Grand Rapids. Already this year, more than 250 people have been fatally shot by on-duty police officers nationwide, according to a [Washington Post database](#), close to the pace from both 2020 and 2021, when more than 1,000 people were shot dead by the police.

In Grand Rapids, officials said that the police officer who fired the fatal shot joined the department in 2015. Mr. Lyoya immigrated to the United States from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2014 and had lived in Grand Rapids for about five years, according to the office of Ben Crump, a lawyer for the family.

“The video clearly shows that this was an unnecessary, excessive and fatal use of force against an unarmed Black man who was confused by the encounter and terrified for his life,” Mr. Crump said. He called for the officer to be fired and prosecuted.

The videos released on Wednesday show Mr. Lyoya driving through a residential area on the cold, rainy morning of April 4 when an officer pulls him over. Mr. Lyoya steps out of his car, the videos show, and appears confused as the officer tells him to get back in the car. The officer asks Mr. Lyoya whether he speaks English.

Mr. Lyoya responds that he does speak English, and asks, “What did I do wrong?” After a brief exchange about whether Mr. Lyoya has a driver’s license, the officer grabs Mr. Lyoya, who pulls away and starts to run, the video footage shows.

The officer tackles Mr. Lyoya in a nearby lawn, yelling “Stop!” as Mr. Lyoya appears to try to regain his footing. At one point, body camera footage shows Mr. Lyoya grasping for the Taser that is in the officer’s hand. Chief Winstrom said he believed that the Taser was fired twice during the encounter, but that it did not hit anyone.

Midway through the struggle, the officer’s body camera stops filming. Chief Winstrom said pressure was applied to the camera to turn it off during the struggle. It was not clear who applied that pressure or whether it was intentional.

Other cameras — from the officer’s vehicle, a nearby doorbell security system and a bystander’s cellphone — capture different portions of the encounter. Shortly before the fatal shot is fired, the officer yells, “Let go of the Taser.” Mr. Lyoya is facing the ground and pushing up, with the officer on top of him, in the moments just before the shooting.

Chief Winstrom called the shooting a tragedy but declined to say whether he thought the officer followed department policy or state law, citing the investigations into the case. The officer is on paid leave and his police powers have been suspended, officials said.

In a statement, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer expressed sympathy to the Lyoya family and called for any protests to be peaceful.

“The Michigan State Police will conduct a transparent, independent investigation of the shooting,” said Ms. Whitmer, a Democrat and former prosecutor. “Then, prosecutors must consider all the evidence, follow the law and take appropriate action on charges. Justice is foundational to safety, and without justice, we are all less safe.”

Mr. Lyoya's death was the latest in a series of incidents that have strained relations between residents and the Grand Rapids police. In 2017, officers searching for a middle-aged woman wanted for a stabbing instead handcuffed an 11-year-old girl at gunpoint while she was leaving a house. Those officers were not disciplined. Months prior, other Grand Rapids officers held five innocent teenagers at gunpoint. And in 2020, local outlets reported, an officer was suspended for two days after shooting a protester in the face with a gas canister.

City data from 2020 showed that Black residents who responded to a survey said they had less trust in the Grand Rapids police than their white and Hispanic neighbors did.

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HEADLINE	04/13 France declines 'genocide' label in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/emmanuel-macron-genocide-ukraine-russia-biden
GIST	<p>Emmanuel Macron has declined to follow Joe Biden's example in labelling Russia's actions in Ukraine as genocide, arguing that an "escalation of words" would not help bring peace.</p> <p>The French president's remarks drew an angry response from Kyiv, particularly his apparent argument that the term "genocide" did not apply because Ukrainians and Russians were "brotherly people".</p> <p>The spokesman for Ukraine's foreign ministry, Oleh Nikolenko, called Macron's remarks disappointing.</p> <p>"'Brotherly' people don't kill children, don't shoot civilians, don't rape women, don't mutilate the elderly, and don't destroy the homes of other 'brotherly' people. Even the fiercest enemies don't commit atrocities against defenseless people," Nikolenko said.</p> <p>Biden accused Moscow of committing genocide late on Tuesday, saying: "Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being Ukrainian."</p> <p>"And the evidence is mounting," he said. "More evidence is coming out of the horrible things that the Russians have done in Ukraine. And we're going to only learn more and more about the devastation. We'll let the lawyers decide internationally whether or not it qualifies, but it sure seems that way to me."</p> <p>The US ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Michael Carpenter, made clear on Wednesday that the president's comments did not represent an official US legal position. Carpenter said Biden had made a "clear moral determination" but added that a legal review was under way and that it is "going to take some time to be completed".</p> <p>Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, echoed Biden's verdict on Wednesday.</p> <p>"I think it's absolutely right that more and more people be talking and using the word genocide in terms of what Russia is doing, what Vladimir Putin has done," Trudeau told reporters in Quebec.</p> <p>"We have seen this desire to attack civilians, to use sexual violence as a weapon of war," he said. "This is completely unacceptable."</p> <p>Asked to comment on Biden's accusation of genocide, Macron said that it was clear the Russian army had committed war crimes, but added: "I am prudent with terms today."</p> <p>"Genocide has a meaning. The Ukrainian people and Russian people are brotherly people," he said. "It's madness what's happening today. It's unbelievable brutality and a return to war in Europe. But at the same time I look at the facts, and I want to continue to try the utmost to be able to stop the war and restore peace. I'm not sure if the escalation of words serves our cause."</p> <p>Another US ally, the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, also stopped short of using the term "genocide" on Wednesday, though he said Putin should be "held to account" for war crimes and atrocities in Ukraine.</p>

Biden has been consistently outspoken in denouncing Russian wholesale killing of Ukrainian civilians, labelling Putin as a “[war criminal](#)” in mid-March. Multiple investigations are under way into Russian atrocities in Ukraine, which include the [razing of Mariupol](#) and the executions of civilians in the [Kyiv suburb of Bucha](#).

The chief prosecutor from the international criminal court (ICC), Karim Khan, visited Bucha on Wednesday and declared: “Ukraine is a crime scene,” adding that there were “reasonable grounds to believe that crimes within the jurisdiction of the court are being committed”.

The three categories of crimes under ICC jurisdiction in Ukraine are war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. A fourth crime, conducting a war of aggression, has been excluded by Khan under ICC rules as neither Ukraine nor Russia are state parties to the court. The Ukrainian government and some international lawyers have called for a special tribunal to be set up specifically to try Putin and his regime for the crime of aggression.

Proving a case under the [1948 Genocide Convention](#) requires an “intent [by the accused] to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”.

Biden first used the word in passing on Tuesday at a domestic policy event in Iowa about the use of ethanol in petrol.

“Your family budget, your ability to fill up your tank, none of it should hinge on whether a dictator declares war and commits genocide half a world away,” he said.

Questioned later on whether he intended to apply the term to Russians actions in Ukraine, Biden told journalists: “Yes, I called it genocide because it’s become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being Ukrainian.”

His comments were quickly welcomed by the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who applauded what he called the “true words of a true leader”.

“Calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil,” [Zelenskiy said on Twitter](#). “We are grateful for US assistance provided so far and we urgently need more heavy weapons to prevent further Russian atrocities.”

Before his invasion, Putin described Ukrainian [separate existence as illegitimate](#), as he argued that Russians and Ukrainians were one people.

As well as wholesale killing of civilians, Russia has been accused of the [forcible transfer](#) of captured Ukrainian civilians into Russia, including large numbers of children, while changing the rules to make it easier for [Russian families to adopt](#) them.

Determining the line between crimes against humanity and genocide has sometimes proved difficult and divisive. The [international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia](#) ruled that the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica constituted genocide but not the mass killings carried out by Serb forces in other municipalities, a distinction that outraged the populations of the other devastated towns.

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HEADLINE	04/14 Day 50 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/14/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-50-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Russian defence ministry has said the entire crew of the warship Moskva, reported to be struck by Ukraine in the Black Sea late on Wednesday, has been evacuated after an ammunition explosion resulted in a fire on the ship. “The cruiser Moskva of the Black Sea Fleet was seriously damaged as a result of the detonation of ammunition that occurred as a result of a

fire, the crew was evacuated,” Russian state media outlet [TASS](#) reported, citing the Russian defence ministry. The ship was defied by Ukrainian troops on [Snake Island](#) at the start of the war.

- **A Ukrainian official earlier said the Moskva had been hit by two missiles but did not give any evidence.** The 12,500-tonne ship has a crew of about 500.
- **Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy called for an oil embargo** in his nightly address on Wednesday. “First of all, we need an oil embargo. And Europe’s clear readiness to give up all Russian energy. The European Union must stop sponsoring Russia’s military machine.”
- **Zelenskiy confirmed forensic experts from the international criminal court visited Bucha on Wednesday to investigate possible war crimes.** “Responsibility for the Russian military for war crimes is inevitable. We will drag them all to the tribunal. And not only for what was done in Bucha.”
- **US president Joe Biden announced an additional \$800m in military assistance to Ukraine including heavy artillery ahead of a wider Russian assault expected in eastern Ukraine.** The package, which brings the total military aid since Russian forces invaded in February to more than \$2.5bn, includes artillery systems, artillery rounds, armoured personnel carriers and unmanned coastal defence boats, Biden said in a [statement](#) after a phone call with Zelenskiy.
- **The US state department on Wednesday defended [Biden’s charge that Russia is carrying out a genocide in Ukraine](#),** saying its forces are trying to destroy the country and its civilian population. Biden levelled the accusation at president Vladimir Putin’s forces for the first time on Tuesday. “I am going to predict that what president Biden called it is what we will ultimately likely find when we are able to gather all of this evidence,” the state department’s number three official, Victoria Nuland, said on CNN. “Because what is happening on the ground is not an accident.”
- **The French president, Emmanuel Macron, has declined to repeat Biden’s accusation that Russia was carrying out “genocide” against Ukrainians, warning that verbal escalations would not help end the war.** The US president said on Tuesday [it had “become clearer and clearer](#) that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being able to be a Ukrainian”. In response, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [described Biden’s comments as “unacceptable”](#).
- **More than 1,000 Ukrainian marines defending the besieged port city of Mariupol have surrendered, Moscow has claimed.** [In one of the most critical battles of the war](#), Russia’s defence ministry said on Wednesday that 1,026 soldiers from Ukraine’s 36th Marine Brigade, including 162 officers, had “voluntarily laid down their arms” near the city’s Ilyich iron and steelworks. **There was no independent confirmation of the claim.**
- **The Russian retreat from around Kyiv has led to the discovery of large numbers of apparently massacred civilians, drawing international condemnation and calls for a war crimes investigation.** The Kyiv district police chief said [the bodies of 765 civilians, including 30 children had been found around the capital](#).
- **Russian troops are reportedly suffering from “low morale and disenchantment” among some of the younger troops.** While speaking at a press conference today, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby also said that Russian troop leaders were “frustrated” as Russia’s invasion of [Ukraine](#) continues.
- **The presidents of four countries bordering Russia – Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – have travelled to Kyiv in a show of support for their Ukrainian counterpart and his embattled troops.** It follows [Kyiv’s reported refusal to meet the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier](#), who visited Poland on Tuesday and said he had planned to go on to Ukraine but “was not wanted”. The former German foreign minister is facing heavy criticism for his past policy of rapprochement towards Moscow.
- **Zelenskiy told Estonian MPs, without providing evidence, that Russia was using phosphorus bombs in Ukraine.** Ukrainian forces in Mariupol said a drone had dropped a poisonous substance on the city, but there has been no independent confirmation that Russia used banned chemical weapons.
- **In a speech at the Atlantic Council on Wednesday, US treasury secretary Janet Yellen said that countries on the fence of Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine could face global isolation.** “The unified coalition of sanctioning countries will not be indifferent to actions that undermine the sanctions we’ve put in place.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland’s prime minister, Sanna Marin, said the country would decide on whether to apply for Nato membership “within weeks”. Speaking at a joint news conference with her Swedish counterpart, Marin said that as a Nato partner – but not a member – Finland was not covered under article 5, which states that an attack on one member should be considered an attack on all. • The UK government has imposed sanctions on another 206 individuals in response to Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, including 178 people it said were involved in propping up the self-proclaimed republics in Luhansk and Donetsk. Liz Truss, the foreign secretary, said the latest sanctions were imposed in a direct response to the “horrific rocket attacks” on a train station in Kramatorsk, eastern Ukraine, that killed dozens of civilians. • Ukraine’s deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said it was not possible to open any humanitarian corridors on Wednesday. She said the situation along the routes was “too dangerous”, and accused Russian forces of violating an agreement to halt shooting while people escape.
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HEADLINE	04/13 Finland, Sweden draw closer to NATO
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/europe/finland-sweden-nato-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Even before his invasion of Ukraine, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had warned Sweden and Finland of “retaliation” should they join NATO. It was, after all, Ukraine’s desire to join the alliance that he cited time and again as provocation for his war.</p> <p>But if his invasion of Ukraine has succeeded at anything so far, it has been to drive the militarily nonaligned Nordic countries into the arms of NATO, as Russian threats and aggression heighten security concerns and force them to choose sides.</p> <p>In a rapid response to Russia’s invasion — and despite Mr. Putin’s threat of “serious political and military consequences” — both Finland and Sweden are now seriously debating applications for membership in the alliance and are widely expected to join.</p> <p>Their accession would be another example of the counterproductive results of Mr. Putin’s war. Instead of crushing Ukrainian nationalism, he has enhanced it. Instead of weakening the trans-Atlantic alliance, he has solidified it. Instead of dividing NATO and blocking its growth, he has united it.</p> <p>“With the contours of European security irrevocably altered since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the direction of thinking in both countries — especially Finland — is getting clearer by the day,” wrote Anna Wieslander and Christopher Skaluba of the Atlantic Council.</p> <p>“From Moscow’s perspective, the result might be another unwanted consequence of its needless and reckless aggression,” they said.</p> <p>At a news conference in Stockholm on Wednesday with Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden, Prime Minister Sanna Marin of Finland said a decision on whether to apply for membership would be made “within weeks” as her government submitted a document to inform parliamentary debate on the issue.</p> <p>“There are of course pros and cons with being a member of NATO, as there are pros and cons of other security choices,” Ms. Andersson said. But, she added, “I see no point in delaying this analysis or the process” over whether to join.</p> <p>NATO officials are publicly discreet, saying only that the alliance has an open-door policy and any country that wishes to join can ask for an invitation. After a meeting of alliance foreign ministers last week, the secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, was coy, but said: “There are no other countries that are closer to NATO.”</p>

Even a speedy application process could take a year, raising concerns that the two countries would be vulnerable to Russia in that time.

Already, the alliance is debating what kind of security guarantees could be provided to Finland and Sweden while their membership is considered. The goal would be to try to ensure that Russia or any other adversary did not take advantage of the interim before the two countries were part of NATO and could benefit from its promise of collective defense.

Both Sweden and Finland are members of the European Union and already have strong partnerships with NATO, participating in military exercises and even strategic and operational planning.

But Finland, with its long border with Russia, famously survived the Cold War as an independent and unoccupied democracy by studiously hewing to neutrality, something some have suggested for Ukraine. Finland has sided openly with the West since the Soviet Union collapsed, though it has kept, like Sweden, a policy of military nonalignment.

Mr. Putin's invasion has led to a head-spinning turnaround in public opinion in Finland in favor of joining the alliance. Led quietly by its president, Sauli Niinisto, Finland is clearing the path toward NATO membership for a more reluctant Sweden.

While Finland's security doctrine includes an option to join NATO if circumstances change, that has not been the case for Sweden. It has a minority government led by the Social Democrats, whose formal position of military nonalignment was confirmed at their party congress in November.

However complicated NATO membership looks for Sweden politically, it would be dangerous to be left outside the alliance if Finland joins, since the two countries are each other's closest defense partners and plan for war together, Ms. Wieslander, a Swede who is the Atlantic Council's director for Northern Europe, said in an interview.

"We always consider Finnish security together with our own," she said.

Opinion is shifting quickly in Sweden, too, with about 50 percent of people now in favor of joining NATO, rising to 62 percent if Finland joins, Ms. Wieslander said. In Finland, a recent poll had 68 percent in favor of joining the alliance, rising to 77 percent if the president and government recommend it.

In Sweden, an all-party parliamentary group led by Foreign Minister Ann Linde is studying the issue, with a report due May 31. That deadline may be accelerated, because a decision to join NATO would have to pass Parliament with a solid majority, and that would depend on the Social Democrats shifting their position, Ms. Wieslander said.

In the last election of 2018, the Social Democrats' vote share fell to 28.3 percent, their lowest since 1908. This makes them more sensitive to public opinion now than before, and just this week, the party announced that it was reconsidering its position on NATO.

Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister, wrote recently in The Washington Post that after the war on Ukraine, "There is no way back to a past of illusionary neutrality."

Given both countries' relationships with NATO, applications to join the 30-member alliance would be accepted quickly, probably in late June, at NATO's summit meeting in Madrid.

But all member states and their legislatures would have to ratify that decision, which took about a year for the last country to join, North Macedonia.

In the meantime, Mr. Niinisto has discussed with President Biden and the British government the possibility of a bilateral or trilateral security guarantee.

Such a guarantee could be politically controversial, but might appeal to Britain. And Washington already has a trilateral defense cooperation agreement with Sweden and Finland that could be broadened.

For the Russians, Ms. Wieslander said, “you’re either under the shield or you’re not,” so security guarantees would have to be public and clear. Of course, she said, Sweden “is ready to shoot, if necessary — we don’t have to be formal allies for that.”

Russian responses are in any case likely to include internet disruptions, hacking of key ministries and disinformation efforts aimed especially at legislators who would have to vote on the issue. Tensions along the borders would increase, as would Russian fighter jets seeming to challenge airspace.

The United States has publicly supported the idea of membership. Julianne Smith, the American ambassador to NATO, said the United States would welcome both countries. “We’ve exercised; we’ve trained with them. They bring very capable militaries,” she said. “They are some of our closest allies in Europe, and so I can’t imagine a situation where there would be tremendous resistance to this idea.”

But it is Russia’s sudden war on Ukraine that has turned old assumptions hollow. The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, reminded Finns of the dangers Moscow presents in a speech on Friday to the Finnish Parliament, recalling the Winter War of 1939-40, when Stalin’s Soviet Union attacked Finland.

“You have seen Russia attack your country, and that threat still exists,” Mr. Zelensky said. “What they did in Bucha, they will do in your cities.” And it was Finnish courage then that has inspired Ukrainians in their own fight, he said.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Manhunt ends but questions linger
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/nyregion/brooklyn-subway-shooting-arrest.html
GIST	<p>After 29 hours in which the police combed the streets, scoured surveillance cameras, patrolled subway platforms and sent an alert to phones across New York seeking tips, the man accused of opening fire on a subway train in Brooklyn and injuring at least 23 people was arrested near a McDonald’s in the East Village, officials said.</p> <p>The suspect, Frank R. James, 62, was taken into custody without a struggle about five miles from the subway station where he is accused of committing one of the worst attacks on New York’s subway system.</p> <p>“My fellow New Yorkers: We got him,” Mayor Eric Adams said in a news conference on Wednesday afternoon. “We got him.”</p> <p>Federal officials charged Mr. James with carrying out a terrorist attack on a mass transit system, according to a criminal complaint filed in federal court in Brooklyn. If convicted, he could face life in prison. He is expected to appear in court on Thursday.</p> <p>It was unclear who alerted the police that Mr. James was at the McDonald’s on First Avenue shortly before he was arrested around 1:40 p.m.</p> <p>There were scores of calls, and an array of people took credit for turning him in. A number of law enforcement officials also said that Mr. James himself may have called the tip line. Police Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell said that detectives were investigating who provided the information about the McDonald’s.</p> <p>Mr. James’s arrest brought some relief to residents worried about an accused gunman at large on the transit system, and to officials who feared that another high-profile violent act on the subway would diminish confidence in the city at a precarious moment in its recovery from the pandemic.</p>

“Everybody’s on edge because of what happened yesterday, obviously,” said Lee Lloyd, who was inside the bar he owns in the East Village when officers surrounded Mr. James and took him into custody. “When we saw five cop cars come through, I was like, ‘Oh, man, what now?’”

But even as the widespread manhunt for Mr. James, which involved multiple federal and state agencies and hundreds of officers, came to a close, the investigation left many questions unanswered. Police officials and prosecutors have not yet provided a motive for the shooting, which left 10 people wounded by gunfire and at least 13 others with other injuries.

The shooting victims ranged from a 15-year-old boy to men and women in their 40s. At least nine people remained hospitalized on Wednesday, but all of them were in stable condition with no life-threatening injuries. A number of those injured in the attack were teenagers or college students who were on a normally mundane trek — heading to school on the train.

Rudy Pérez, 20, was struck in the left leg and had to be helped off the train by another passenger, he said. Doctors told him it will be about a month until he can walk again. Until then, Mr. Pérez, who works in construction, is unsure how he will be able to do his job, and is worried about his safety.

“I’m afraid it’ll happen again,” he said, adding, “I’m worried about everyone else.”

The authorities have not fully accounted for Mr. James’s whereabouts after the shooting. And with the attack provoking questions about ongoing efforts to make the subways safer, transit officials on Wednesday acknowledged that a surveillance camera at the station where the attack took place was not working properly.

Maintenance workers inspected the camera at the station on Sunday, transit officials said, two days before the shooting, and traced the problem to a fiber-optic cable connection failure that also interrupted feeds from cameras in two other stations: the local stop immediately before the scene of the shooting and the one immediately after it.

Mr. Adams on Tuesday said the issue had initially slowed the police’s efforts to identify and locate the gunman.

Though Mr. James was initially described as a person of interest whom the police wanted to question, the police said he was considered the lone gunman early Wednesday as their investigation progressed.

“We were able to shrink his world quickly,” Commissioner Sewell said. “There was nowhere left for him to run.”

The police have accused Mr. James of putting on a gas mask on an N train, then releasing two smoke grenades and firing a Glock 9-millimeter handgun at passengers as the train pulled into the 36th Street station in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park neighborhood.

Mr. James, who has addresses in Wisconsin and Philadelphia, first came to the police’s attention after investigators at the crime scene found an array of belongings on the train that included the gun, a credit card with Mr. James’s name on it and a key to a U-Haul van he was later found to have rented, officials said.

James Essig, the Police Department’s chief of detectives, said that investigators could see Mr. James on video entering the Kings Highway station on the N line, eight stops away from the site of the shooting. The U-Haul vehicle he rented was found three blocks away from that station, Chief Essig said.

The video shows Mr. James in an orange reflective jacket and yellow construction hat, carrying a bag that was later found at the crime scene, said an official close to the investigation who was not authorized to discuss it publicly. In the video, Mr. James swipes a MetroCard and struggles to pass through the turnstiles. He then gets the attention of a station agent and enters the station through a gate.

Federal officials say surveillance footage later showed Mr. James exiting the subway system at the 25th Street station, one stop away from the shooting scene, according to the criminal complaint.

Chief Essig said detectives believed Mr. James boarded an R train across the platform from the N train at the 36th Street station, as did some of the shooting victims and many panicked riders. He then rode one stop and headed outside.

Mr. James was next spotted entering the 7th Avenue subway stop in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood, more than a mile away, at around 9:15 a.m. on Tuesday, Chief Essig said. At the time, detectives were just beginning their attempts to track him down.

It is not yet clear where he traveled next, and Chief Essig said that detectives were continuing to review video footage. "We're going to back track that," he said. "That will take literally weeks."

As they hunted for information, the police used an emergency alert — typically used for weather-related warnings or to find abducted children — to point people across the city toward pictures of Mr. James and urged those with information to call a phone number for tips.

With the authorities pressing to track down the gunman, the uncertainty around Mr. James's location left some commuters on the city's bustling subway system on Wednesday on edge. Many riders said they were determined to go on with their normal routines, but some admitted to heightened feelings of unease as they rode the trains.

Marco Meza, 38, a building painter, said he lives near the site of the shooting. At the busy Atlantic-Barclays station on Wednesday, he said he was still in shock, and that he was struggling to overcome feelings that he should avoid the subway. But he has no choice.

"I have to do it," Mr. Meza said. "I have to wake up every morning and do my things."

The subway is the backbone of New York and officials are intently focused on allaying concerns over its safety as they try to restore ridership that cratered at the onset of the pandemic.

In the aftermath of the shooting, officials, including Gov. Kathy Hochul, Commissioner Sewell and Janno Lieber, the head of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, posted photos or videos on social media showing them on public transit. They and Mr. Adams, who is isolating after testing positive for Covid, urged riders to return.

"The subway has a special place in New York's heart," Mr. Lieber said on MSNBC. "We're never going to let it be taken over by maniacs."

While ridership data for Wednesday was not yet available, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said that ridership on Tuesday, the day of the attack, was down by about 312,000 people from one week earlier, to about 3.05 million riders.

That total represents about 51 percent of prepandemic levels.

Ridership levels fluctuate based on many factors. It is unclear how much of the drop may have been attributed to the shooting and the related disruptions it caused as transit officials suspended some service to allow the police to investigate.

On many busy platforms, hurried riders said the Brooklyn shootings had already become a distant memory, or that their concerns had receded because of their need to make a living.

When Louie Dacunha, 30, was asked about the shooting, his reaction was, "Oh yeah, that happened."

“I wasn’t even thinking about that,” Mr. Dacunha said. “I was just thinking, ‘I gotta go where I gotta go.’”

As Mr. James was taken into custody more details emerged about a life that included numerous arrests.

He was born in New York City in 1959, according to public records, and his sister, Catherine James Robinson, said that he moved frequently between cities.

Police officials said that he was arrested nine times in New York between 1992 to 1998, on a number of charges including possession of burglary tools, a criminal sex act and criminal tampering. He was arrested three times in New Jersey, the first in 1991, the most recent in 2007.

In filling out a portrait of Mr. James, detectives have focused on dozens of videos they say he posted on YouTube in which he delivered bigoted rants tied to current events.

In some, he commented on New York’s subway, criticizing Mr. Adams’s policies to address homelessness on public transit as ineffective and speculating that the mayor could not possibly stop all crime in the system. In others, he mused about violent acts and alluded vaguely to the possibility of committing them.

Inside the jacket Mr. James discarded on the subway platform at 36th Street, investigators found a receipt from a storage facility in Philadelphia, where he rented an apartment for about two weeks starting at the end of March, according to the federal criminal complaint.

When they searched the storage unit and his apartment on Tuesday and Wednesday, they found handgun ammunition, a Taser, a high-capacity rifle magazine and a smoke canister, the criminal complaint said.

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HEADLINE	04/13 NY: 2 omicron subvariants spreading fast
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/13/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#two-new-omicron-subvariants-are-spreading-quickly-in-new-york-state
GIST	<p>Two new versions of Omicron, the coronavirus variant that has swept through the world in the past few months, are circulating in New York State and may be responsible for rising infections in the region over the past few weeks, state health officials announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>The appearance of these variants, both of which evolved from the subvariant BA.2, may explain why New York has been the national hot spot the last few weeks, the officials said. So far, the new viruses do not appear to cause more severe disease than previous variants, the officials said.</p> <p>The two subvariants appear to spread rapidly, with a growth advantage of about 25 percent over BA.2, which itself was more contagious than any variant that came before it. But it’s unclear whether the subvariants spread more quickly because of greater contagiousness or an improved ability to sidestep the body’s immune defenses. One of the new subvariants has a mutation that has been shown to help dodge immunity.</p> <p>“It’s just a reminder that we’re not out of the woods with regard to this virus, and people should continue to take precautions and to get fully vaccinated if they haven’t completed their course,” said Kirsten St. George, a virologist for the state who led the work.</p> <p>In March, the subvariants — called BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1 — accounted for more than 70 percent of new cases in central New York State, a figure that has now risen above 90 percent. The viruses comprise one in five cases in the Finger Lakes region.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The subvariants have been detected in more than 40 other countries and in more than 30 states across the United States, Dr. St. George said.</p> <p>Both new forms of the virus evolved from BA.2, which now accounts for nearly 81 percent of coronavirus cases in New York. A previous version of Omicron, BA.1, sent cases soaring over the winter to unprecedented highs.</p> <p>Officials at New York State’s Department of Health have been tracking the spread of variants since late 2020, and significantly stepped up those efforts last year. But with the rise of rapid testing at home, the state may be sequencing fewer than five percent of new infections, Dr. St. George said.</p> <p>The number of cases so far may seem to be insignificant compared with the steep Omicron peak of the winter, but “we’re essentially back at levels of case rates back to the Delta wave,” said Eli Rosenberg, deputy director for science at the New York State Department of Health. “This would have been a very significant wave already by last year’s standards.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 National public health emergency extended
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/13/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#biden-covid-public-health-emergency-extended
GIST	<p>The Biden administration extended the U.S. coronavirus public health emergency, now more than two years old, for another 90 days on Wednesday. The move will maintain a range of health benefits received by some of the most vulnerable Americans during the pandemic, including access to coronavirus tests and telehealth services.</p> <p>The decision to extend the emergency was expected, public health experts said, even though top federal health officials have said the nation is now in a favorable position, with fewer people hospitalized for Covid-19 lately than at any time since the early weeks of the pandemic.</p> <p>The Department of Health and Human Services made a commitment at the beginning of President Biden’s term to give states at least two months’ warning before allowing the emergency declaration to lapse. Some governors have asked for even more time to prepare. The latest extension pushes back the expiration to mid-July.</p> <p>Republican lawmakers called on the administration in February to stop extending the emergency, which was first declared by the Trump administration, saying that its continuation at a time when the crisis was ebbing amounted to government overreach.</p> <p>Since then, a highly transmissible version of the virus, the Omicron subvariant known as BA.2, has become the dominant form among new U.S. cases, which have started ticking up again. As of Tuesday, the nation was averaging more than 31,000 new cases a day, an 8 percent increase over the last two weeks, according to a New York Times database, though the case counts have not approached the peak seen in the winter Omicron surge.</p> <p>Reported cases may be an undercount of the virus’s true spread to some degree, since access to at-home tests has increased and the results of such tests are often not reported to state health officials.</p> <p>Public health experts say the emergency declaration has offered a lifeline to people who might otherwise have lost health coverage. A key provision has allowed people covered by Medicaid, which saw record levels of enrollment during the pandemic, to stay in the program without going through the usual paperwork checks — and even if their incomes have risen above the normal ceiling for eligibility.</p> <p>Juliette Cubanski, a deputy director of the Kaiser Family Foundation who has researched and written about the effects of the public health emergency, said the extension announced on Wednesday meant that the U.S. health care system had at least another few months to plan for when its protections would end.</p>

	<p>The emergency declaration, she said, “has given us a tremendous sense of security in an otherwise very insecure and uncertain time.”</p> <p>“While we can’t live in a state of public health emergency forever, there’s still a bit of uncertainty about whether we are ready as a health care system to do without the flexibilities” it offers, Ms. Cubanski said. Private insurers and Medicare will continue to cover the cost of at-home virus tests as long as the public health emergency remains in effect.</p> <p>The emergency has helped Medicare recipients substantially in other ways, notably by expanding eligibility for telehealth appointments at a time when some doctors’ offices were temporarily closed, leaving older and more vulnerable people struggling to see doctors in person, or hesitating to take the risk.</p> <p>If the emergency declaration had lapsed, many Medicare beneficiaries who did not live in rural areas or enroll in Medicare Advantage plans could have lost access to telehealth services.</p> <p>“It’s meant the ability to access care that otherwise would have been inaccessible,” Ms. Cubanski said. Using telehealth, she added, has “kept people from serious health consequences that they might have otherwise suffered.”</p> <p>The emergency declaration has also allowed hospitals to receive a 20 percent bump in Medicare payment rates for treating Covid-19 patients, at a time when many providers have faced crushing financial pressures.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Fears: China ‘zero-Covid’ policy politicized
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/13/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#chinas-covid-zero-policy-prompts-fears-of-a-devastating-mao-style-political-campaign
GIST	<p>Single-minded adherence to a rigid policy playbook, despite warnings about unintended consequences, has gotten China into trouble in the past, and many in the country are worried that it could be happening again.</p> <p>Long before its “zero-Covid” policy, China had a “zero-sparrow” policy. In the spring of 1958, the government mobilized the nation to try to exterminate sparrows, which Mao Zedong had declared to be pests that destroyed crops. All over China, people banged pots and pans, lit firecrackers and waved flags to keep the birds from landing, so they would fall and die from exhaustion.</p> <p>But sparrows ate harmful insects, and with the birds nearly gone, insect infestations ruined crops and contributed to the three-year Great Famine, when tens of millions of Chinese starved to death.</p> <p>The fear in China now is that the “zero-Covid” policy has become another Mao-style political campaign based on the will of one person — the country’s top leader, Xi Jinping — that could end up hurting everyone.</p> <p>Just as Mao and his lieutenants ignored scientists’ opposition to their anti-sparrow policy, Beijing has been ignoring experts’ recommendations that China abandon its costly zero-Covid strategy and focus on managing the virus.</p> <p>Instead, Beijing has insisted on following the same playbook it has used since 2020, which relies on mass testing, quarantine and lockdowns that have disrupted hundreds of millions of people’s lives.</p> <p>Mr. Xi is seeking a third term at an important Communist Party congress later this year, and wants to use success in containing the virus to show that China’s top-down government model is superior to those of liberal democracies.</p> <p>“This disease has been politicized,” Zhu Weiping, an official in Shanghai’s disease control apparatus, told a person who complained about the city’s response to the virus outbreak there.</p>

	As the Omicron subvariant known as BA.2 spread , about 373 million people in 45 Chinese cities were under full or partial lockdowns as of Monday, according to estimates by economists at the investment bank Nomura.
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HEADLINE	04/13 South Africa floods death toll rises
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/africa/south-africa-durban-floods.html
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG — The death toll from several days of punishing rain that drenched the city of Durban and the surrounding areas near South Africa’s east coast rose to more than 250 on Wednesday as the nation’s president visited the area to take stock of the devastation.</p> <p>Although the rain in the region stopped on Tuesday, officials were still trying to fully assess the massive human and infrastructure toll as rescue crews rummaged through muddy hillsides in search of the missing.</p> <p>The steady rain, which came down in droves at times, started late last week and continued almost nonstop through the weekend, washing away bridges, leaving gaping holes in roadways, and sweeping homes and shacks from their foundations. Parts of a national highway were flooded and looked like a river.</p> <p>President Cyril Ramaphosa traveled on Wednesday to KwaZulu-Natal Province, the area where the destruction occurred, meeting with provincial leaders and touring affected regions.</p> <p>“You have experienced the biggest tragedy that we have ever seen,” Mr. Ramaphosa told residents of an affected community, according to television news video of his visit.</p> <p>Witnesses and rescue workers gave harrowing accounts of what unfolded, as riverbanks overflowed and muddy water flooded communities.</p> <p>Some residents sought refuge on rooftops, waiting to be rescued. In Tongaat, a town 40 minutes north of the Durban city center, a woman driving home with two children was swept away by a river that broke its banks, according to Bilal Jeewa of Gift of the Givers, a charity group.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 DOJ moves to curb police abuses in 2 cities
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/politics/justice-dept-policing.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Justice Department took steps on Wednesday to overhaul policing practices in Washington, D.C., and Springfield, Mass., such as how and when to use force, as President Biden works to fulfill his campaign promise to curb police abuses.</p> <p>The department said it had reached an agreement with the city of Springfield, Mass., after an investigation into its police department’s narcotics bureau found a pattern of excessive force. Under that agreement, known as a consent decree, the Springfield police will improve policies and training to ensure that officers avoid the use of force whenever possible.</p> <p>In a separate legal filing, the Justice Department said the U.S. Park Police and the Secret Service had changed policies related to how they police demonstrations, bringing to a close a case that civil rights groups had brought against the Trump administration. The groups accused officials of abusing their power in violently dispersing protesters who had gathered outside the White House two years ago.</p> <p>The Biden administration has struggled to make meaningful progress on a vow to curb police abuses. A bipartisan effort to pass a national policing overhaul collapsed in Congress last year, and the White House is still working to draft an executive order on police reform after police groups complained that their views had not been taken into account in an early version of the document.</p>

Efforts to overhaul law enforcement are particularly sensitive as police agencies suffer from thinning ranks and increasing workloads and crime ticks higher in cities across the country.

The consent decree in Springfield, the first under the Biden administration since Attorney General Merrick B. Garland rescinded a Trump administration policy curbing their use, still awaits approval by a federal judge.

The Justice Department began investigating Springfield's police department under the Trump administration. In a statement on Wednesday, Kristen Clarke, the head of the Justice Department's civil rights division, said the department had found systemic problems that led to excessive violent use of force by officers in the narcotics bureau. Those problems, she said, had been created by deficiencies in policies, training and accountability mechanisms.

"The pattern or practice of unlawful conduct eroded the public's trust," Ms. Clarke said. "It undermined the police department's ability to fight crime."

The Biden administration has so far opened four other similar investigations, in Louisville, Ky.; Minneapolis; Phoenix; and Mount Vernon, N.Y. The administration is also enforcing 11 consent decrees.

The agreement with the Park Police and the Secret Service is part of a settlement that stems from multiple lawsuits that civil rights groups filed against former President Donald J. Trump; his last attorney general, William P. Barr; and officials from other federal agencies as well as the local police.

In June 2020, demonstrators gathered in Lafayette Park, outside the White House, to denounce police violence in the days after George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, was killed by a police officer. Law enforcement officers, including from the Park Police and the Secret Service, and National Guard troops flooded into the park to clear the way for Mr. Trump to walk across it, with mounted police and riot officers using tear gas, other military-grade weapons and violent force. Some officers were accused of covering their badges and other identifying markers.

The Park Police has now agreed that all officers must wear clearly visible identification on their uniforms. It can no longer revoke demonstration permits absent danger to public safety or violations of law, and officers must let protesters safely leave if they are asked to disperse.

The Secret Service, for its part, must make clear in its policies that using force and dispersing protesters are not generally justified simply because some people in a crowd of protesters are engaged in unlawful conduct.

The changes "will strengthen our commitment to protecting and respecting constitutionally protected rights," Vanita Gupta, the associate attorney general, said in a statement.

Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a police think tank based in Washington, welcomed the changes.

"When I think about that day at Lafayette Park, there were so many things that went wrong," he said. "It's important that the Justice Department came to these conclusions."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Tropical storm hits Philippines; 123 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/asia/tropical-storm-megi-philippines.html
GIST	MANILA — Rescue workers battled intermittent heavy rain to reach many people still missing Wednesday, three days after Tropical Storm Megi pummeled the country, causing widespread landslides and flooding in the central Philippines.

By noon Thursday, 123 deaths had been confirmed. Hardest hit was the city of Baybay in central Leyte Province, where landslides buried a remote community. Eighty-six people were known to have died there, local officials said.

Mark Timbal, a spokesman for the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, said local officials in Leyte had pre-emptively evacuated many residents in Baybay into areas that were safe — or so they thought.

“The landslide reached beyond the hazard-prone areas,” Mr. Timbal said in Manila on Wednesday. “Some of the residents had evacuated there and did not expect the landslide to reach that location.”

“We did not foresee the devastation brought about by this landslide,” he added.

While the storm had moved out of the Philippines, intermittent rains had continued, hampering search and rescue efforts.

Baybay’s mayor, Jose Carlos Cari, said on Wednesday that he feared the casualty figures could rise. “We are still searching for many people missing,” he said. “Our responders are wading through mud.”

The nearby town of Abuyog was also hit by a landslide. Floodwaters had receded, but officials said nearly 80 percent of one village there had been wiped out. Thirty-one deaths had been confirmed as of Thursday.

“After the landslide, the remaining 20 percent of houses along the coast were swamped by a storm surge,” said Lemuel Gin Traya, Abuyog’s mayor. “It was one huge wave.”

All in all, about nine regions and an estimated 139,000 people in the Philippines’ eastern seaboard were affected, the disaster relief agency in Manila said.

The Philippines sits on the so-called typhoon belt, and endures an estimated 20 storms a year, some devastating.

In December, about 400 people were killed when [Typhoon Rai](#) pummeled the central region. And in November 2013, [Typhoon Haiyan](#) slammed the central Philippines, killing thousands.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Juul to pay WA \$22.5M to settle lawsuit
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/e-cigarette-giant-juul-to-pay-wa-22-5-million-to-settle-deceptive-advertising-lawsuit/
GIST	<p>Juul Labs, the e-cigarette giant, will pay \$22.5 million to settle a lawsuit brought by Washington state that alleged it intentionally targeted teenagers with its products, while deceiving consumers about the addictiveness of its vaping products, Attorney General Bob Ferguson announced Wednesday.</p> <p>“Juul’s conduct harmed Washingtonians,” Ferguson said. “Juul violated the law; they did it over and over again.”</p> <p>Ferguson said that the company “fueled a staggering rise in vaping use” that “reversed decades of progress in fighting youth nicotine addiction.”</p> <p>Under the terms of the settlement Juul admits no wrongdoing or liability, and says it settled “for the purpose of compromising” and to avoid further litigation.</p> <p>Juul must also stop all advertising that appeals to youth and stop most social media advertising, with limited exceptions. It can continue to run Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn ads that feature adults who were habitual cigarette smokers giving testimony about Juul products.</p>

Juul had already, in 2019, announced the suspension of all print, broadcast and digital advertising in the United States.

Juul also must conduct a “secret shopper” program in Washington to confirm the ages of its customers, with at least 25 checks per month for at least two years. The secret shopper program, described by Ferguson as the “most robust” in the country, requires the shoppers to confirm retailers are complying with age and product limits and then report back to the attorney general.

The settlement money will be paid out over four years. Ferguson’s office will use it to establish a new “health equity” unit to respond to “deceptive and discriminatory health care practices that disproportionately impact vulnerable communities and communities of color.”

Austin Finan, a Juul spokesperson, said the company supports efforts to address underage use, including future monitoring and enforcement.

“This settlement is another step in our ongoing effort to reset our company and resolve issues from the past,” Finan said. “The terms of the settlement are consistent with our current business practices and past agreements to help combat underage use while offering adult smokers access to our products as they transition away from combustible cigarettes.”

Juul currently faces similar lawsuits in at least 12 other states, Ferguson said.

Ferguson’s lawsuit, filed in 2020 in King County Superior Court, alleged that beginning in 2015, Juul used a social media campaign of young models, with bright colors and “concepts of being ‘cool,’ ‘smooth,’ and ‘hip.’”

Juul used “youth friendly flavors” in an introductory starter pack that included cool mint, fruit medley and crème brûlée, Ferguson wrote, alleging that Juul “knew that these flavors were the most popular with underage consumers.”

The marketing worked. In 2019, more than 20% of high school sophomores reported using vape products in the previous 30 days, according to a New England Journal of Medicine study. Juul, at the time, had more than 70% of the e-cigarette market, Ferguson wrote.

But teenager e-cigarette use has seen declines more recently. In 2020, 19.6% of high schoolers reported recent e-cigarette use, according to the CDC’s National Youth Tobacco Survey. Last year, that number fell to 11.3%.

Juul stopped selling fruit and dessert flavors in October 2019 as it attempted to quell political backlash, although the discontinued flavors accounted for less than 10% of the company’s sales.

The company also deceptively marketed its e-cigarettes to all consumers, not just kids and teenagers, Ferguson alleged. The company represented one Juul pod as having about the same nicotine content as a pack of cigarettes, Ferguson wrote, when one pod can actually deliver twice as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.

Juul also marketed its products as a quit-smoking device despite not having the requisite FDA approval to make such claims, Ferguson alleged.

“The existing evidence is insufficient to demonstrate JUUL products are effective to help users quit smoking,” Ferguson wrote. “By contrast, the opposite concern is very real: that people (especially youth) begin using e-cigarettes and transition to traditional cigarettes.”

The settlement is the latest in a series between Juul and states that alleged the company had engaged in deceptive practices and marketed its e-cigarettes to kids.

	In November, the company agreed to pay Arizona \$14.5 million and vowed not to market to young people in the state. Last June the company agreed to pay North Carolina \$40 million, even as it denied any wrongdoing or liability. The company also said it has reached a settlement with Louisiana.
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HEADLINE	04/13 Officials: vaccines not required for students
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-board-of-health-votes-against-adding-covid-vaccines-to-k-12-school-required-immunizations/
GIST	<p>COVID-19 vaccines will not be required for students to attend K-12 schools in Washington this fall, the state Board of Health decided in a unanimous vote Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>The issue has divided many school communities over the past year and made its way to the Board of Health's radar last fall, when the board created a separate technical advisory group tasked with researching whether a COVID vaccine would meet all the scientific criteria needed to be added to the list of required K-12 immunizations.</p> <p>The advisory group at the end of February voted to recommend against adding a COVID vaccine to the list of school immunizations required by a state administrative code.</p> <p>Shortly after noon Wednesday, the board approved the group's recommendation, effectively putting an end to the discussion for now.</p> <p>"The Department of Health very much supports the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations," state Secretary of Health Dr. Umair A. Shah, a board member, said before the vote. "... I also want to affirm the overall recommendation of the (technical advisory group), but that does not take away from the fact that our department continues to remain committed to its work to encourage the public to get vaccinated against COVID-19."</p> <p>Shah later introduced a motion to accept the advisory group's recommendation, and board member Patty Hayes, former director of Public Health – Seattle & King County, quickly seconded after highlighting an ongoing need for schools to hire more nurses.</p> <p>Dr. Tao Kwan-Gett, the state's science officer and co-chair of the advisory group, noted that while the advisory group recommended against requiring COVID vaccines in schools, "it may become necessary to assess whether this recommendation must change."</p> <p>"It's really important for us to continue close surveillance of COVID-19 and be open to this possibility," Kwan-Gett said.</p> <p>If new data on how the vaccine affects school-age kids surfaces, or if a new variant emerges that appears to show more severe disease in children, for example, the board could revisit the issue in the future, he said.</p> <p>Some of the main reasons the advisory group and board agreed not to require COVID vaccines for students stemmed from accessibility and implementation concerns, rather than vaccine effectiveness issues.</p> <p>"We have to be sensitive to the fact that this is a very contentious issue," said board member Bob Lutz, former health officer of Spokane County's public health department. "... We will continue to advocate for vaccines because they're effective, but we also have to look at the social implications."</p> <p>He cited school superintendents' concerns about chronic absenteeism and parents/caregivers pulling their children from school during the pandemic, wondering if a COVID vaccine requirement might worsen the problem.</p>

In addition, board and advisory group members agreed more data is needed about vaccines for kids ages 5 to 11. The Pfizer-BioNtech COVID vaccine has been [granted emergency authorization by the Food and Drug Administration](#) for ages 5 to 15, but has not yet been fully approved for that age range.

In Washington, state health leaders have acknowledged vaccination rates among younger kids have lagged compared to teen and adult rates. As of last week, about 32% of kids between 5 and 11 were fully vaccinated, while about 55% of 12- to 15-year-olds and 62% of 16- and 17-year-olds had received both shots, according to DOH data.

Prior to Wednesday's vote, members of the advisory group analyzed nine criteria that address vaccine effectiveness, disease burden and implementation, meaning the group investigated COVID shots' efficacy and affordability, the morbidity of the disease, and the reality of delivering and tracking shots.

According to the state's administrative code that requires immunizations for entry to schools or day cares, students are required to be vaccinated against, or show proof of acquired immunity for, chickenpox, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B and a few other diseases.

Students with medical, religious, philosophical or personal exemptions are excluded from the requirement. The board has not acted against its advisory group's recommendation in at least the past decade, board chair Keith Greller said earlier this year.

Some education advocates, including the Seattle School Board, have come out in favor of a mandate for school COVID vaccinations, while Gov. Jay Inslee has expressed doubts, saying he worries such a move would prompt more parents to take their children out of schools.

In the United States, only two states — California and Louisiana — have added COVID vaccines to the list of required immunizations for school-age kids, [according to Pew Charitable Trusts](#). Both requirements would be enforced next school year, and only if the FDA grants full authorization to the kid-sized vaccine dose.

"This is a science we know now and it is evolving," Lutz said. "Vaccines are changing, and the vaccines of today are probably not going to be the vaccines of tomorrow, or even three months from now."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Destructive wildfires New Mexico, Colorado
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/wildfire-destroys-at-least-150-structures-in-new-mexico-town/
GIST	<p>Firefighters scouted the drought-stricken mountainsides around a New Mexico village on Wednesday as they looked for opportunities to slow a wind-driven wildfire that a day earlier had burned at least 150 homes and other structures while displacing thousands of residents and forcing the evacuation of two schools.</p> <p>Homes were among the structures that had burned, but officials did not have a count of how many were destroyed in the blaze that torched at least 6.4 square miles (16.6 square kilometers) of forest, brush and grass on the east side of the community of Ruidoso, said Laura Rabon, spokesperson for the Lincoln National Forest.</p> <p>Rabon announced emergency evacuations of a more densely populated area during a briefing Wednesday afternoon as the fire jumped a road where crews were trying to hold the line. She told people to get in their cars and go.</p> <p>So far, no deaths or injuries were reported from the fire, which has been fanned by strong winds.</p> <p>The winds prevented forced a suspension of the aerial attack on the flames and kept authorities from getting a better estimate of how large the fire has grown. But some planes returned to the air as winds</p>

subsided late in the day, and seven airtankers and two helicopters have now been assigned to the fire, Forest Service officials said Wednesday evening.

While the cause of the blaze was under investigation, fire officials and forecasters warned Wednesday that persistent dry and windy conditions had prompted red flag warnings for a wide swath that included almost all of New Mexico, half of Texas and parts of Colorado and the Midwest.

Five new large fires were reported Tuesday, and nearly 1,600 wildland firefighters and support personnel were assigned to large fires in the southwestern, southern and Rocky Mountain areas, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Hotter and drier weather coupled with decades of fire suppression have contributed to an increase in the number of acres burned by wildfires, fire scientists say. And the problem is exacerbated by a more than 20-year Western megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate change. The fire season has become year-round given changing conditions that include earlier snowmelt and rain coming later in the fall.

In Ruidoso, officials declared a state of emergency and said school classes were canceled Wednesday as the village — about 140 miles (225 kilometers) northeast of El Paso, Texas — coped with power outages due to down power lines.

The residences that burned were mostly a mix of trailers and single-family homes, and close to 4,000 people were displaced by evacuations that were ordered Tuesday. That number was expected to grow with the latest call for residents to leave.

Village spokeswoman Kerry Gladden said authorities spent part of Wednesday surveying as much damage as possible before the winds kicked up again. Air tankers also were able to drop a few loads of slurry, and more air support was expected Thursday.

“Right now, everybody is just rallying around those who had to be evacuated,” Gladden said. “We’re just trying to reach out to make sure everyone has places to stay.”

Donations were pouring in from other communities in southern New Mexico. State officials said emergency grants have been approved that will provide resources to firefighters and for other emergency efforts.

Ruidoso in 2012 was hit by one of the most destructive wildfires in New Mexico history, when a lightning-sparked blaze destroyed more than 240 homes and burned nearly 70 square miles (181 square kilometers).

Rabon said Wednesday that no precipitation was in the forecast and humidity levels remained in the single digits, which would make stopping the flames more difficult.

“Those extremely dry conditions are not in our favor,” she said.

Another wildfire in the Lincoln National Forest northwest of Ruidoso burned at least 400 acres (1.6 square kilometers) after it was sparked Tuesday by power lines downed by high winds. Crews confirmed Wednesday that 10 structures there were lost.

Elsewhere in New Mexico, wildfires were burning along the Rio Grande south of Albuquerque, in mountains northwest of the community of Las Vegas and in grasslands along the Pecos River near the town of Roswell.

In Colorado, crews were battling wind-whipped grass fires that had destroyed two homes and forced temporary evacuations.

HEADLINE	04/13 CDC extends travel masks requirement
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/ap-source-cdc-to-extend-travel-mask-requirement-for-2-weeks/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced Wednesday that it is extending the nationwide mask requirement for airplanes and public transit for 15 days as it monitors an uptick in COVID-19 cases.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it was extending the order, which was set to expire on April 18, until May 3 to allow more time to study the BA.2 omicron subvariant that is now responsible for the vast majority of cases in the U.S.</p> <p>“In order to assess the potential impact the rise of cases has on severe disease, including hospitalizations and deaths, and health care system capacity, the CDC order will remain in place at this time,” the agency said in a statement.</p> <p>When the Transportation Security Administration, which enforces the rule for planes, buses, trains and transit hubs, extended the requirement last month, it said the CDC had been hoping to roll out a more flexible masking strategy that would have replaced the nationwide requirement.</p> <p>The mask mandate is the most visible vestige of government restrictions to control the pandemic, and possibly the most controversial. A surge of abusive and sometimes violent incidents on airplanes has been attributed mostly to disputes over mask-wearing.</p> <p>Separately, the Biden administration also extended for 90 days a public health emergency that has been in effect since early 2020. That allows temporary continuation of a range of public health measures that do have broad support, from more generous Medicaid coverage to flexibility around telehealth.</p> <p>The mask requirement for travelers was the target of months of lobbying from the airlines, who sought to kill it. The carriers argued that effective air filters on modern planes make transmission of the virus during a flight highly unlikely. Republicans in Congress also fought to kill the mandate.</p> <p>Critics have seized on the fact that states have rolled back rules requiring masks in restaurants, stores and other indoor settings, and yet COVID-19 cases have fallen sharply since the omicron variant peaked in mid-January.</p> <p>“It is very difficult to understand why masks are still required on airplanes, but not needed in crowded bars and restaurants; in packed sports arenas; in schools full of children; or at large indoor political gatherings,” Nicholas Calio, the CEO of industry trade group Airlines for America, said Wednesday in a letter to the heads of the CDC and the Health and Human Services Department. “Simply put, an extension of the mask mandate does not make sense.”</p> <p>There has been a slight increase in cases in recent weeks, with daily confirmed cases nationwide rising from about 25,000 per day to more than 30,000. More than 85% of those cases are the highly contagious BA.2 strain. Those figures could be an undercount since many people now test positive on at-home tests that are not reported to public health agencies.</p> <p>Severe illnesses and deaths tend to lag infections by several weeks. The CDC is awaiting indications of whether the increase in cases correlates to a rise in adverse outcomes before announcing a less restrictive mask policy for travel.</p> <p>A poll in mid-March by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that Americans are evenly divided over keeping the mask rule for transportation.</p> <p>The poll found that 51% wanted the mandate to expire and 48% said it should remain in place – in effect, a tie, given the poll’s margin of error. Democrats overwhelmingly supported the rule, and</p>

	<p>Republicans were even more united in opposing it. Vaccinated people and those with chronic health conditions favored keeping the rule, but by smaller margins.</p> <p>Airlines imposed their own mask mandates in 2020, when the Trump administration declined to take action. Unions representing flight attendants, which once backed mask rules, now decline to take a position because their members are divided over the issue.</p> <p>It is unclear whether eliminating the rule would make people more or less likely to travel on planes or subways.</p> <p>Ed Bastian, the CEO of Delta Air Lines, said that some people might start flying if they don't have to wear a mask, and others might stop flying if other passengers are unmasked. He called both groups "fringe," and he predicted that many people will continue to wear masks even if the rule is dropped.</p> <p>As for the broader public health emergency just extended by the Department of Health and Human Services, the administration has promised to give states 60 days' notice before ending it.</p> <p>Winding down the emergency declaration could force an estimated 15 million Medicaid recipients to find new sources of coverage, require congressional action to preserve broad telehealth access for Medicare enrollees, and scramble special COVID-19 rules and payment policies for hospitals, doctors and insurers. There are also questions about how emergency use approvals for COVID-19 treatments will be handled.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 WHO: Covid cases, deaths fall for 3rd week
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/who-covid-cases-and-deaths-fall-for-3rd-consecutive-week/
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The number of new coronavirus cases and deaths reported to the World Health Organization fell for a third consecutive week, a trend likely helped by the dismantling of testing and surveillance programs.</p> <p>In its latest weekly report on the pandemic, issued late Tuesday, the U.N. health agency said the more than 7 million new cases reported represented a 24% decline from a week earlier. The weekly worldwide number of COVID-19 deaths, was down 18%, at over 22,000.</p> <p>WHO said the decreases "should be interpreted with caution" as numerous countries where the virus is starting to subside have changed their testing strategies, meaning far fewer cases are being identified.</p> <p>New cases and deaths are falling in every region of the world, including the Western Pacific, where a surge of infections has triggered severe lockdown measures in China.</p> <p>WHO said it was monitoring several mutants of the virus descended from the omicron variant, including some recombined forms of existing omicron subvariants.</p> <p>In a separate statement, the health organization said scientists in Botswana and South Africa have detected new forms of the omicron variant, labeled as BA.4 and BA.5, but aren't sure yet if they might be more transmissible or dangerous.</p> <p>To date, the new versions of omicron have been detected in four people in Botswana and 23 people in South Africa. Beyond Africa, scientists have confirmed cases in Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>WHO said there was so far no evidence the new sub-variants spread any differently than the original omicron variant.</p>

	<p>“There is no cause for alarm with the emergence of the new sub-variants,” Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO’s Africa director, said in a statement. “We are not yet observing a major spike in cases, hospitalizations or deaths.”</p> <p>The agency called on all countries to sequence at least 5% of their COVID-19 samples; many countries, including Britain, Sweden and the United States, recently scrapped their widespread testing programs as the number of severe cases dramatically declined.</p> <p>Still, the U.S. will soon mark 1 million COVID-19 deaths, and the virus is continuing to cause concern in China.</p> <p>Officials warn Shanghai still doesn’t have its latest surge in omicron-involved cases under control despite a “zero-tolerance” approach that has seen some residents confined to their homes for three weeks or longer.</p> <p>The lockdown has led to frustration among Shanghai residents about running out of food and unable to get deliveries. Censors have diligently scrubbed complaints from social media.</p> <p>State-controlled outlets describe a successful campaign to provide food and other supplies and counseled residents that “persistence is victory.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Local officials support travel mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/pierce-county-leaders-support-extending-public-transportation-mask-mandate/281-1a424616-2a2a-49cd-953d-9214908e72a6
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — The Biden administration has extended the federal mandate for masks on public transit for another two weeks. The move comes as the CDC monitors the spread of the omicron variant of COVID-19, and notes the rise in cases across the country.</p> <p>In Pierce County, the latest 14-day case rate taken by the county was 73.8 per 100,000. The number is nearly 10% higher than the last two-week period.</p> <p>Nigel Turner, Division Director of Communicable Disease Control for the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department, said wearing masks can go a long way in containing the spread of the virus.</p> <p>“I think for people to continue to wear masks... in a public setting such as transit, will help reduce transmission,” Turner explained. “It’s something we continue to recommend, and one of the various steps people should be thinking about to control COVID in our community.”</p> <p>Turner said the county is in a much better place to handle the spread of COVID-19, and he hopes people are remaining vigilant.</p> <p>“We have great vaccines that’re broadly available, we have boosters that’re available, we have options for people to get treated,” Turner said. “We have great resources, and I think it’s a good reminder for folks, as we see rates rise elsewhere, of the important things they need to do to protect the health of their families and communities.”</p> <p>Pierce Transit has several precautions in place to keep employees and customers protected from COVID-19. Riders are given masks, and buses are equipped with barriers to protect the operators.</p> <p>The public transit service is also experimenting with new technologies to keep the virus from spreading. “We have a pilot program going on right now, using filters and UV light to clean the air,” said Rebecca Japhet, Communications Manager for Pierce Transit.</p>

	<p>The federal mask mandate is helpful for having a consistent set of guidelines across all public transit organizations, Japhet said, which goes a long way to keep riders safe.</p> <p>“We lean on each other for making sure our messages are consistent, there’s been a lot of signage out there to wear masks,” Japhet said. “It’s been really great to coordinate with our counterparts around the region, by having consistent information.”</p> <p>Japhet said Pierce Transit will provide masks to anyone who wants to continue wearing a mask while they’re riding, even after the mandate is lifted.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 FBI releases files Horizon plane theft, crash
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/fbi-releases-classified-documents-2018-horizon-air-plane-theft-crash/EIYCMGT6LJEWJKURH6ZHPQWOC/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigations has released more than 500 pages of previously classified documents about the investigation of a Horizon Airlines plane stolen from Sea-Tac Airport and crashed on Ketron Island in 2018 by a ground services worker.</p> <p>One new piece of information that was released surrounded what was in a spiral notebook of 29-year-old Richard “Beeboo” Russell, who stole and flew an empty Horizon Air Bombardier Q400.</p> <p>The FBI noted that Russell wrote about then-President Donald Trump and the effects his immigration policies were having. He wrote he had the desire to do something that would benefit all mankind.</p> <p>Investigators said Russell worked alone when he was working as a ground service agent for the airline, and that he towed the turboprop out a hanger, climbed into the cockpit, and took off.</p> <p>The flight data indicates Russell, who was never trained as a pilot, was in full control of the plane until his final descent, when he crashed into Ketron Island and killed himself.</p> <p>Russell was a ground agent who had limited access to planes and towing equipment.</p> <p>Authorities said they saw no apparent security violations before he stole the plane, but Russell had been drinking a lot, resulting in his friends and family trying an intervention, of which they indicated he seemed fine afterward.</p> <p>Days after the crash, one of Russells’ coworkers told KIRO 7 that they both had issues with being overworked and underpaid at Horizon Air, and he apparently learned to fly the plane from video games, but he did not know how to land it.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Inflation hitting food banks, families hard
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/inflation-surging-food-prices-hit-washington-state-food-banks-hard
GIST	<p>Food pantries are seeing even bigger crowds now that food costs are surging due to runaway inflation. But that’s not all. Inflation is putting the squeeze on food pantries in other ways.</p> <p>The Ballard Food Bank often counts on donated or “recovered” food from restaurants, stores, and the community to help its clients.</p> <p>But it also buys food. The Ballard Food Bank is now spending an extra \$500 a month on milk because of inflation.</p> <p>Meanwhile, more people are relying on their services. Ballard Food Bank said on average, it’s helping 1,200 families or about 3,000 people, per week.</p>

"I'm thankful we have this place to come to," said Erica, one of the many people who count on the Ballard Food Bank-especially now that food prices are sky high. "I can see it in the dairy. The yogurt. The bacon is unreal. I started coming to the food bank. This is like my third time since inflation has been getting really bad."

Food bank volunteers like Debbie Lam notice the difference too.

She's seeing more families come in for help.

"A lot of times when they come here, they're amazed at the abundance of what we have here to share," Lam said. "They're so appreciative, so grateful. It's hard for them to be able to save with the rate of inflation and pay rent."

"We're definitely seeing more people than we've ever seen before. With inflation going up, people are going to need food banks that much more," said Jen Muzia, Ballard Food Bank Executive Director. "They can get fresh fruit and vegetables. They can get meat. When you go to buy those in the grocery stores, they are super expensive. That really dips into people's budgets. By being able to come to food bank and get food for free to feed their families, that really helps their dollar go further when right now, groceries are eating it up, the inflation is eating it up."

"For those on fixed incomes or lower income recipients, it's a lot more difficult for them to purchase the items they need to buy on a regular basis know that primarily involves food and gasoline."

Inflation is hitting families hard in Washington State.

"National inflation is 8.5 percent," said Debra Glassman, professor at the UW Foster School of Business. "The Pacific region is about 8.1 percent."

Turek explained the significance of the newly released inflation numbers just released Tuesday from Bureau of Labor Statistics. It measures the inflation rate by the change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) over the last 12 months and over the most recent month (March). The CPI is an index of prices for goods consumers purchase most commonly covering food, shelter and clothing.

"The Annual CPI (February 2021 to February 2022) for our area increased by 8.1 percent. Our inflation rate is currently running ahead of the San Francisco region (5.2 percent annually) and behind the Phoenix area (10.9 percent). On a 2-month basis (January-February), our regional CPI increased 1.7 percent which means that if this pace is sustained, inflation in our area will have reached 10.2% annually in 2022."

"This is all happening against the backdrop of the supply chain disruptions we've been hearing about," Glassman said.

That means food pantries like Ballard Food Bank are feeling the squeeze again---first during the pandemic and now because of runaway inflation.

"As I see those prices go up in terms of food, I'm recognizing it's even more important that we have a budget that can support that," Muzia said. "Before the pandemic, we had a food budget of about \$300,000 for all our food programs. And now, it's upwards of \$800,000."

Ballard Food Bank said its spending now more than ever before to buy food when they can't get it donated.

"We'll see their store shelves empty and that means we'll actually have to go and buy some of those things now to make sure those people can get those items here," Muzia said. "So, we see increased costs."

KOMO News reached out to the director of the Marysville Food Bank. He said an eight percent increase in food costs due to inflation could easily cost him an extra \$30,000 a year.

HEADLINE	04/13 DOH: 1,471,754 cases, 12,589 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article260383712.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 1,138 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,589, up seven from seven days prior. The confirmed death tally as of March 27 was 12,546.</p> <p>The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,471,754 cases on Wednesday. That figure represents an increase of 4,591 cases from Friday's report. Data was not released on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Amazon adds 5% 'fuel, inflation surcharge'
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Amazon-adds-5-fuel-and-inflation-surcharge-to-17078749.php
GIST	<p>Amazon is taking a step to offset its rising costs, announcing Wednesday it will add a 5% "fuel and inflation surcharge" to fees it charges third-party sellers who use the e-commerce giant's fulfillment services.</p> <p>The Seattle-based company said on its website that the added fees, which take effect April 28, are "subject to change" and will apply to both apparel and non-apparel items.</p> <p>The latest fee hike follows one announced in November and went into effect in January. Amazon didn't immediately respond to a request for further details on the recent move. But in a notice sent to sellers Wednesday, the company said its costs had gone up since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic due to increases in hourly wages, the hiring of workers and construction of more warehouses.</p> <p>It said it had absorbed costs whenever possible, and only increased fees to address permanent costs and to be competitive with other providers. Amazon competitors FedEx and UPS both have fuel surcharges.</p> <p>"In 2022, we expected a return to normalcy as COVID-19 restrictions around the world eased, but fuel and inflation have presented further challenges," the company said in the notice.</p> <p>Federal data released Tuesday showed inflation jumped 8.5% in March, its fastest pace in more than 40 years. Gasoline prices have rocketed 48% in the past 12 months.</p> <p>Though the company is blaming inflation and rising fuel costs for the surcharge, Stacy Mitchell, co-director for the anti-monopoly group Institute for Local Self-Reliance, criticized Wednesday's announcement, saying Amazon was taking advantage of the moment.</p> <p>"Amazon keeps increasing its fees on the sellers that have to depend on its platform," Mitchell said, adding the new fees are a way "to take more money out of the pockets of independent businesses and put it into Amazon's coffers."</p> <p>Amazon's third-party marketplace, where independent merchants list millions of their products, is a huge part of its business. It has about 2 million sellers, and more than half the goods sold on Amazon.com come from these sellers.</p> <p>Last year, sellers paid Amazon about \$103 billion in fees, which made up about 22% of the company's revenue. The online retailer said the new fees will apply to products ordered before April 28 but shipped and delivered after that date. Amazon is also expected to release its earnings report from the first three months of this year on April 28.</p>

	Amazon has long faced accusations of undercutting merchants that sell on its platform by making “knock-offs,” or very similar products, and boosting their presence on the site.
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HEADLINE	04/13 ‘Clear patterns’ Russian abuses in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-abuses.html
GIST	<p>Investigators from almost a dozen countries combed bombed-out towns and freshly dug graves in Ukraine on Wednesday for evidence of war crimes, and a wide-ranging investigation by an international security organization detailed what it said were “clear patterns” of human rights violations by Russian forces.</p> <p>Some of the atrocities may constitute war crimes, said investigators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who examined myriad reports of rapes, abductions and attacks on civilian targets, as well as the use of banned munitions.</p> <p>On Wednesday, civilians were still bearing much of the brunt of the seven-week-old invasion as Russian forces, massing for an assault in the east, bombarded Ukraine’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, striking an apartment building.</p> <p>In an hourlong phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President Joe Biden said the United States, already a major provider of defensive armaments to Ukraine, would send an additional \$800 million in military and other security aid. The package will include “new capabilities tailored to the wider assault we expect Russia to launch in eastern Ukraine,” Biden said in a statement.</p> <p>U.S. officials also said Wednesday that the United States, in helping Ukraine prepare for such an assault, had increased the flow of intelligence to Ukraine’s government about Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine eight years ago.</p> <p>War crimes claims are famously difficult to investigate and still harder to prosecute. It’s rare for national leaders to be charged and even rarer for them to end up in the defendant’s chair.</p> <p>But the war in Ukraine may prove different, some experts say, and momentum has been building to hold the Kremlin leadership responsible.</p> <p>An International Criminal Court investigation into possible war crimes has been underway since last month, and a number of countries have been looking at ways for the United Nations to help create a special court that could prosecute Russia for what is known as the crime of aggression. Other possibilities include trying Russians in the courts of other nations under the principle of universal jurisdiction, the legal concept that some crimes are so egregious that they can be prosecuted anywhere.</p> <p>Part of the motivation for accountability is the revulsion in Europe and much of the world over the behavior of President Vladimir Putin’s forces, including reported executions of bound civilians and other atrocities.</p> <p>War crimes experts also point to technological advances in forensic tools like facial identification software not available to those looking into earlier conflicts, and the sheer number of investigators on the ground in Ukraine — crucially, with the government’s blessing. A dozen French investigators joined the inquiries this week.</p> <p>“There will be prosecutions, and probably all over the world,” said Leila Sadat, an international law professor at Washington University in St. Louis and a longtime adviser to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on crimes against humanity. “Ukraine is actually crawling with war crimes investigators right now.”</p> <p>Still, experts warned that the process would be slow, and that any early indictments would most likely be against lower-ranking Russian officials and armed service members. Russia, which has described the accusations as fictional or unfounded, is not expected to cooperate in any prosecution.</p>

The report released Wednesday by the OSCE, a 57-member organization based in Vienna that includes Russia, Ukraine and the United States, is one of the first in-depth studies of human rights abuses during Russia's offensive against Ukraine.

Investigators looked at some of the most notorious attacks and other violent acts of the war, including Russia's bombings of a theater and a maternity hospital in the besieged city of Mariupol, both depicted in the report as apparent war crimes.

They also pored through accounts of other horrific, if less visible, acts of violence. "There are allegations of rapes, including gang rapes, committed by Russian soldiers in many other regions in Ukraine," they wrote.

But often, they were stymied.

Russia declined to cooperate with the three-person team of investigators, making it "impossible for the mission to take account of the Russian position on all pertinent incidents," the report said.

Investigators found that Ukrainian forces, too, had been guilty of some abuses, particularly in the treatment of prisoners of war. "The violations committed by the Russian Federation, however, are by far larger in nature and scale," their report said.

Michael Carpenter, the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE, said the report "documents the catalog of inhumanity perpetrated by Russia's forces in Ukraine." The European Union issued a similarly positive appraisal.

"This war is not only fought on the ground," the bloc said in a statement. "It is clear that the Kremlin is also waging a shameful disinformation campaign in order to hide the facts of Russia's brutal attacks on civilians in Ukraine. Reliable information and collection of facts have therefore never been as important as today."

The Kremlin's own mission to the OSCE dismissed the findings as "unfounded propaganda."

On Tuesday, even as Ukrainian authorities were unearthing bodies in full view of international journalists and other observers, Putin called the atrocities a "fake" that had been elaborately staged by the West.

On Wednesday, standing near the site of two mass graves, Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said there was an obligation to uncover the facts and to do so in a transparent way to combat Russian disinformation.

"When you see dead bodies here, from the other side, from the Russian Federation, they say it is all fake, all this is our theater," Venediktova said.

Ukrainian prosecutors and the newly arrived team of French experts exhumed bodies this week from mass graves in Bucha, a Kyiv suburb, where hundreds of civilians were killed during the brief Russian occupation of the area. The French government said that its team included ballistics and explosives experts and that it had the ability to do rapid DNA tests.

Evidence from the French investigation and others involving several countries will be channeled to the International Criminal Court, which started looking into possible war crimes a week after the Feb. 24 invasion. Although Ukraine is not part of the agreement that created the court two decades ago, it has granted the court authority to investigate and prosecute in this conflict.

Investigators say they are intent on showing the world the reality of the war.

“They can see everything. They can see the situation here: real graves, real dead bodies, real bomb attacks,” Venediktova said. “That’s why for us this moment is very important.”

The OSCE report described a range of subterfuge by Russian forces, including the use of Red Cross emblems, white flags, Ukrainian flags and civilian clothes. And the organization’s investigators expressed concern that both sides might be holding more prisoners than disclosed.

On Wednesday, Zelenskyy spoke directly about one of them: Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian politician and ally of Putin’s who was detained this week. Zelenskyy proposed exchanging him for Ukrainians held captive by Russian forces.

Even as agreement grew among many world leaders that war crimes charges were warranted, there was some disagreement over how to characterize Russia’s actions. Some leaders, among them Biden, have begun to use the term “genocide” — an escalation of his rhetoric. On Wednesday, French President Emmanuel Macron dissented.

“What is happening is madness, it’s a brutality that’s unheard-of,” Macron said. But, he said, “Genocide has a meaning. The Ukrainian people and the Russian people are brethren people.

“I’m not sure that an escalation of words serves the cause,” he said.

The war crimes report came amid signs that Russia’s invasion may have backfired in at least one respect. Putin has long objected to NATO’s expansion eastward into the onetime domains of the Soviet Union, describing it as a fundamental threat to Russia. But on Wednesday, two militarily nonaligned nations, Finland and Sweden, said they were seriously considering joining the alliance.

Legal experts did not rule out the possibility, some day, of an indictment of Putin, who has already been castigated as a war criminal by some Western leaders. And were Putin to be criminally charged by a court outside Russia, it would likely mean he would have to restrict his international travel in order to minimize the risk of possible arrest were he to venture beyond Russia’s borders.

David Crane, a legal scholar at Syracuse University who was the chief prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, an international war crimes tribunal that convicted former Liberian President Charles Taylor, said he was confident that the International Criminal Court or some other judicial body would find legal grounds to charge the Russian president.

And even if Putin is never arrested and remains the leader of Russia, he said, the legal and diplomatic consequences of a war crimes indictment would severely undermine his credibility.

It would be as if “there’s like an ash mark on his forehead,” Crane said. “There’s no good options for him.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 Russia yet to slow Western arms to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/russia-has-yet-to-slow-a-western-arms-express-into-ukraine/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Western weaponry pouring into Ukraine helped blunt Russia’s initial offensive and seems certain to play a central role in the approaching, potentially decisive, battle for Ukraine’s contested Donbas region. Yet the Russian military is making little headway halting what has become a historic arms express.</p> <p>The U.S. numbers alone are mounting: more than 12,000 weapons designed to defeat armored vehicles, some 1,400 shoulder-fired Stinger missiles to shoot down aircraft and more than 50 million rounds of ammunition, among many other things. Dozens of other nations are adding to the totals.</p>

President Joe Biden on Wednesday approved another \$800 million worth of military assistance, including additional helicopters and the first provision of American artillery.

These armaments have helped an under-gunned Ukrainian military defy predictions that it would be quickly overrun by Russia. They explain in part why Russian President Vladimir Putin's army gave up, at least for now, its attempt to capture Kyiv, the capital, and has narrowed its focus to battling for eastern and southern Ukraine.

U.S. officials and analysts offer numerous explanations for why the Russians have had so little success interdicting Western arms moving overland from neighboring countries, including Poland. Among the likely reasons: Russia's failure to win full control of Ukraine's skies has limited its use of air power. Also, the Russians have struggled to deliver weapons and supplies to their own troops in Ukraine.

Some say Moscow's problem begins at home.

"The short answer to the question is that they are an epically incompetent army badly led from the very top," said James Stavridis, a retired U.S. Navy admiral who was the top NATO commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013.

The Russians also face practical obstacles. Robert G. Bell, a longtime NATO official and now a professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech University, said the shipments lend themselves to being hidden or disguised in ways that can make them elusive to the Russians — "short of having a network of espionage on the scene" to pinpoint the convoys' movements.

"It's not as easy to stop this assistance flow as it might seem," said Stephen Biddle, a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University. "Things like ammunition and shoulder-fired missiles can be transported in trucks that look just like any other commercial truck. And the trucks carrying the munitions the Russians want to interdict are just a small part of a much larger flow of goods and commerce moving around in Poland and Ukraine and across the border.

"So the Russians have to find the needle in this very big haystack to destroy the weapons and ammo they're after and not waste scarce munitions on trucks full of printer paper or baby diapers or who knows what."

Even with this Western assistance it's uncertain whether Ukraine will ultimately prevail against a bigger Russian force. The Biden administration has drawn the line at committing U.S. troops to the fight. It has opted instead to orchestrate international condemnation and economic sanctions, provide intelligence information, bolster NATO's eastern flank to deter a wider war with Russia and donate weapons.

In mid-March, a Russian deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said arms shipments would be targeted.

"We warned the United States that pumping weapons into Ukraine from a number of countries as it has orchestrated isn't just a dangerous move but an action that turns the respective convoys into legitimate targets," he said in televised remarks.

But thus far the Russians appear not to have put a high priority on arms interdiction, perhaps because their air force is leery of flying into Ukraine's air defenses to search out and attack supply convoys on the move. They have struck fixed sites like arms depots and fuel storage locations, but to limited effect.

On Monday, the Russians said they destroyed four S-300 surface-to-air missile launchers that had been given to Ukraine by an unspecified European country. Slovakia, a NATO member that shares a border with Ukraine, donated just such a system last week but denied it had been destroyed. On Tuesday, the Russian Ministry of Defense said long-range missiles were used to hit two Ukrainian ammo depots.

As the fighting intensifies in the Donbas and perhaps along the coastal corridor to the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula, Putin may feel compelled to strike harder at the arms pipeline, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called vital to his nation's survival.

In the meantime, a staggering volume and range of war materiel is arriving almost daily.

"The scope and speed of our support to meeting Ukraine's defense needs are unprecedented in modern times," said John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary. He said the approximately \$2.6 billion in weapons and other material that has been offered to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden administration is equivalent to more than half of Ukraine's normal defense budget.

One example: The Pentagon says it has provided more than 5,000 Javelin missiles, which are among the world's most effective weapons against tanks and other armored vehicles — and can even take down a low-flying helicopter. The missile, shaped like a clunky dumb bell and weighing 50 pounds (23 kilograms), is fired by an individual soldier; from its launch tube it flies up at a steep angle and descends directly onto its target in what is known as a curveball shot — hitting the top of a tank where its armor is weakest.

The Pentagon said Wednesday that an unspecified number of additional Javelins are to be delivered by Thursday, and the U.S. will complete the delivery of 100 armed Switchblade "kamikaze" drones this week.

The specific routes used to move the U.S. and other Western materials into Ukraine are secret for security reasons, but the basic process is not. Just this week, two U.S. military cargo planes arrived in Eastern Europe with items ranging from machine guns and small arms ammunition to body armor and grenades, the Pentagon said.

A similar load is due later this week to complete delivery of \$800 million in assistance approved by Biden just one month ago. The weapons and equipment are offloaded, moved onto trucks and driven into Ukraine by Ukrainian soldiers for delivery.

Kirby said the material sometimes reaches troops in the field within 48 hours of entering Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	04/13 UN: Ukraine war threatens poor nations
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/un-says-ukraine-war-threatens-to-devastate-many-poor-nations/
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Russia's war on Ukraine threatens to devastate the economies of many developing countries that are now facing even higher food and energy costs and increasingly difficult financial conditions, a U.N. task force warned Wednesday.</p> <p>U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres released the report saying that the war is "supercharging" a crisis in food, energy and finance in poorer countries that were already struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and a lack of access to adequate funding for economic recovery.</p> <p>"We are now facing a perfect storm that threatens to devastate the economies of many developing countries," Guterres said at a news conference. "As many as 1.7 billion people — one-third of whom are already living in poverty — are now highly exposed to disruptions in food, energy and finance systems that are triggering increases in poverty and hunger."</p> <p>Rebeca Grynspan, secretary-general of the U.N. agency promoting trade and development who coordinated the task force, said those people live in 107 countries that have "severe exposure" to at least one dimension of the crisis — rising food prices, increasing energy prices and tightening financial conditions.</p>

In these countries, the report says, people struggle to afford healthy diets, imports are essential to meet food and energy needs, and “debt burdens and tightening resources limit government’s ability to cope with the vagaries of global financial conditions.”

The report says 69 of the countries, with a population of 1.2 billion people, face a “perfect storm” and are severely or significantly exposed to all three crises. They include 25 countries in Africa, 25 in Asia and the Pacific, and 19 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, prices were already on the rise, “but the war has made a bad situation worse,” Guterres said.

Thirty-six countries rely on Russia and Ukraine for more than half their wheat imports, including some of the world’s poorest countries, he said, and wheat and corn prices have risen 30% just since the start of the year.

Russia is also the world’s top natural gas exporter and second-largest oil exporter, and Russia and neighboring Belarus export about 20% of the world’s fertilizers. Guterres said oil prices have increased more than 60% over the past year, natural gas prices have jumped 50% in recent months, and fertilizer prices have doubled.

The task force said the world is “on the brink of a global debt crisis.” Grynspan, who heads the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, pointed to Sri Lanka’s default on a debt payment Tuesday and said other countries are asking for help.

Guterres said the world can act to tackle the “three-dimensional crisis” and “cushion the blow.”

The task force calls on countries to ensure a steady flow of food and fertilizer through open markets, lift export restrictions, and direct surpluses and reserves to those in need. Guterres said this would help keep a lid on food prices and calm volatility in food markets.

On energy, the task force urges governments to refrain from hoarding, immediately release strategic petroleum stockpiles and additional reserves, and reduce the use of wheat for biofuels. Guterres urged countries to use the crisis as an opportunity to accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

On finance, the task force issued “an urgent call for prompt and swift action from the international community” to help developing countries avoid another decade of lost economic development, “a generalized debt crisis, and social and political instability.”

The task force says international financial institutions should provide emergency concessional financing to countries experiencing social and economic distress.

It calls on the International Monetary Fund to increase limits for rapid financial assistance, suspend interest rate surcharges for two years, and explore the possibility of providing more liquidity “through special drawing rights or special measures targeted at the vulnerable and most affected countries.”

Guterres said the upcoming spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank on April 18-24 are “a crucial moment” for decisions on many of these issues. He said it is crucial that their members understand the need to use money that is available to alleviate the suffering of people around the world.

The U.N. chief said political will is key, and announced that he has asked six leaders — the presidents of Senegal and Indonesia and the prime ministers of Germany, Barbados, Denmark and Bangladesh — to mobilize political leaders to ensure that developing countries in crisis get the help they need.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Croatia: crashed drone carried a bomb
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/investigators-drone-that-crashed-in-croatia-carried-a-bomb/

GIST	<p>ZAGREB, Croatia — A military drone that apparently flew all the way from the Ukrainian war zone over three European NATO member states before crashing in the Croatian capital was armed with an explosive device, Croatian crash investigators said Wednesday.</p> <p>The 6-ton Soviet-era aircraft apparently drifted uncontrolled out of Ukraine, crossed into Romania and Hungary before entering Croatia, slamming into a field near a student dormitory early morning on March 10 in Zagreb. About 40 parked cars were damaged in the large explosion, but no one was injured.</p> <p>Members of the Croatian investigative team told reporters Wednesday that fragments of the drone found at the crash site showed that the device carried an “improvised aircraft bomb” that was filled with unknown type of explosives.</p> <p>“It was unequivocally established that these were fragments of the OFAB 100-120 air bomb,” said Maj. Mile Tomic. “Both the bomb and its trigger were made in the former USSR.”</p> <p>The investigators said that they have not yet conclusively determined which side in the war in Ukraine launched the TU-141 drone that was originally used in surveillance missions. But they indicated that the Ukrainians are more like to be behind the launch as “fresh” paint traces of their blue and yellow flag were found on the pieces of the wreckage that also included a red star, the Russian air force marking.</p> <p>Both Russia and Ukraine have denied launching it.</p> <p>NATO officials have refused to comment on the incident until an investigation is completed, but the alliance had increased its surveillance flights over countries near the war zone and a pair of US Air Force F-16s were deployed from Aviano Air Base, Italy, to Croatia on March 16, taking part in exercises and bolstering NATO’s southeastern flank.</p> <p>Croatian officials had criticized NATO for what they called a slow reaction to a very serious incident and called into question the readiness of the military alliance’s member states to respond to a possible attack.</p> <p>NATO said the alliance’s integrated air and missile defense had tracked the object’s flight path. But Croatian officials said the country’s authorities weren’t informed and that NATO reacted only after questions were posed by journalists.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Cracks in Putin’s propaganda bubble shows
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/politics/russia-propaganda-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, D.C. — Using a mix of high-tech and Cold War tactics, Ukrainian activists and Western institutions have begun to pierce the propaganda bubble in Russia, circulating information about the Russia-Ukraine war among Russian citizens to sow doubt about the Kremlin’s accounts.</p> <p>The efforts come at a particularly urgent moment: Moscow appears to be preparing for a new assault in eastern Ukraine that could prove devastatingly bloody to both sides, while mounting reports of atrocities make plain the brutality of the Kremlin’s tactics.</p> <p>As Russia presents a sanitized version of the war, Ukrainian activists have been sending messages highlighting government corruption and incompetence in an effort to undermine faith in the Kremlin.</p> <p>Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a U.S.-funded but independent news organization founded decades ago, is trying to push its broadcasts deeper into Russia. Its Russian-language articles are published on copies of its websites called “mirrors,” which Russian censors seek out in a high-stakes game of whack-a-mole. Audience numbers have surged during the war despite the censorship.</p> <p>U.S. organizations are also promoting the use of software that allows Russian citizens to leap over the nascent firewall erected by the Kremlin to control internet access.</p>

The efforts face high barriers as the Kremlin tightens controls on journalists and the internet, passing laws that have forced the closure of independent media outlets, like the Echo of Moscow. President Vladimir Putin is doing all he can to keep Russians in the dark about Europe's largest land war since 1945, with casualties going largely unreported in Russian news media.

The Russian government has focused in particular on restricting reports of war casualties. In its most recent official announcement, in late March, Russia reported 1,351 military deaths, while the latest U.S. intelligence estimate, which was shared with Congress in recent days, put the number at 4,000 to 5,000.

But cracks in Moscow's facade are starting to show. On Thursday, the Kremlin's spokesperson acknowledged that Russia had suffered "significant losses."

After the war started in February, Putin began erecting an internet firewall similar to China's to block some Russian and Western news sites and social media networks. Russians can still visit Google and YouTube, but many Western sources of news are labeled "foreign agents."

An authoritarian government does not have to maintain a perfect firewall to keep its public in a propaganda bubble. Many Russians get their news from state-controlled television and radio. And some Russian analysts argue that most citizens support the government for reasons beyond their news diet and want to believe the Kremlin's lines.

American intelligence officials say that is why pushing information into Russia, and reaching the broadest population, is so difficult.

Nevertheless, American and European officials say that the attempt by outsiders to get facts about the war to Russians is important.

For now, Putin and the invasion remain popular in Russia, according to polls, though analysts caution that such measures of Russian attitudes are unreliable, mainly because many people fear making anti-war statements. The police have arrested thousands of protesters, and many people self-censor their remarks on Ukraine.

There are early signs that the efforts to break down the wall of propaganda may be working, said a senior Western intelligence official, who like other security officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss classified or sensitive government assessments.

And a U.S. data analytics company, FilterLabs.AI, which has been tracking Russian sentiment on internet message boards and other online forums, says it has measured growing anxiety among Russians about the draft and war casualties. Putin recently signed a decree ordering up about 134,500 conscripts, though the Defense Ministry said they would not go to Ukraine.

"We could be at a turning point in Russian sentiment toward the initial invasion of Ukraine, when Russia attempted to take over the whole country," said Jonathan Teubner, CEO of FilterLabs.

Planting the seeds of doubt

The email to the 18-year-old Russian was, in some ways, subtle. It did not directly mention the invasion of Ukraine or allegations of war crimes against Russian soldiers.

Instead, it talked about the mistreatment of Russian soldiers by their own military and suggested the Russian government was lying to conscripts and, crucially, providing inadequate food and equipment to the country's soldiers.

Over the last two weeks, a group of Ukrainian activists, government officials and think tanks, called the Information Strategies Council of Ukraine, has sent emails and social media messages to 15 million

Russian men of draft age, between 18 and 27. It aimed other posts at older Russians, using historical references to prod them to discuss government-sanctioned news reports.

“The fundamental problem is that when you want to tackle the propaganda, you cannot just say what you are getting on TV is not true; it doesn’t work like that,” said Sophia Hnizdovska, an executive at the council. “We are trying to slowly, through our narratives, make people question the official sources.”

The most successful posts by the Ukrainian activists have built on this theme, focusing on the incompetence and corruption of Russian military leaders, members of the group say.

One image circulated by the group portrayed senior Russian military leaders, including Sergei Shoigu, the defense minister, with his head filled with question marks and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the senior military leader, with his head filled with an image of a superyacht.

Russians tend to dismiss messages highlighting Russian war crimes as American propaganda, according to activists, and pictures of Russian casualties run the risk of inciting anger at Ukraine, rather than the Kremlin.

Teubner’s company is trying to measure the Ukrainians’ success — and in recent days has tracked what appears to be growing negative sentiment across Russia toward a draft. If the Ukrainians can sow enough doubt about the truthfulness of the Russian government, Hnizdovska said, more Russians will seek out information from Western-supported Russian-language news media.

Radio waves and real news

During the Cold War, the U.S. government, and the CIA specifically, helped found and fund independent media organizations with the mission to penetrate the Iron Curtain with fact-based news.

With the invasion of Ukraine, the organizations are once again operating with a sense of urgency as they push to get accurate information inside an authoritarian state.

The news organizations are using both old-school and 21st-century tactics, creating radio programs and complex digital information campaigns.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the main private, independent news organization in the region with U.S. government financing, is producing journalism on the war from reporters on the front lines in Ukraine and working quietly in Russia.

Commonly known as RFE/RL, the group has a Russian-language news site and a 24-hour Russian-language television network, Current Time, as well as websites aimed at regional audiences in a wide range of languages, including Tatar, Chechen and Belarusian.

Like some other news organizations and U.S.-based social media companies, its websites were blocked in Russia starting in late February. And it suspended its main operations in Russia last month.

RFE/RL opened offices in Lithuania and Latvia as new bases for its reporting on Russia. The group also has a medium-wave radio transmitter in Lithuania to send broadcasts into Russia that can be picked up on an AM frequency. Officials said they hoped to expand the signal’s strength.

The group uses Telegram, a chat app, to disseminate some of its reporting and to send out the web addresses of its new “mirror” sites.

A Washington-based sister organization that also gets funding from the U.S. government, the Open Technology Fund, sets up the mirror sites and constantly creates new ones to stay a step ahead of Russian government censors.

“In the context of new censorship, the mirror program has grown rapidly, and Russian censors are proving to be a very active adversary,” said Nat Kretchun, the organization’s senior vice president for programs. “Our partners are setting up a more automated system where once the Russian censors block them, new sites are set up.”

The technology group arranges for some of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s sites to be hosted by Tor, a digital communications network that helps shield ordinary internet users from surveillance. And it gives financing to companies and groups developing virtual private network apps, software known as VPNs, that help citizens get around internet firewalls. Owners of smart TVs in Russia can also download an app for Current Time.

And Current Time is among the RFE/RL networks and programs with channels on YouTube, which, unlike Facebook and Instagram, has not been blocked by Russian censors. RFE/RL said the number of video views on its YouTube channels more than tripled in the first three weeks of the war, to 237.6 million, from the three weeks prior.

“We’re seeing higher audience numbers for Russians inside the country and also for Russians outside,” said Jamie Fly, president and CEO of RFE/RL. “The challenge is: Can we maintain that over time? Will interest fade?”

In mid-March, Russian news outlets began running stories saying that Russian casualties in Ukraine were low, in contrast to much higher Western estimates. Those reports, according to an analysis by FilterLabs, came just as concern about the country’s war dead was starting to rise on local internet message boards — and as soldiers’ coffins began returning home.

Stories about Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine and Russian prisoners of war are among the most popular across RFE/RL platforms, said Patrick Boehler, the head of digital strategy for the news organization. The news agency’s reporters in Ukraine who learn the identities of Russians killed or taken prisoner pass that information to colleagues in Russia, who then try to find and interview the families.

The software developed by FilterLabs began tracking changes in public sentiment and shifts in how Russian news outlets talk about wartime casualties. Some skeptics question this kind of artificial-intelligence-driven sentiment analysis, and FilterLabs acknowledges that the technology has limits.

But the group says the broad trends it identifies are reliable and show that concern about the draft is increasing, as discussions on message boards appear to indicate that Russians are growing more worried that their children will be conscripted into the military to fight in Ukraine, Teubner said.

“The overall sentiment when talking about the draft is trending very negatively in the popular forums,” he said. “This shows us what is likely one of the greatest vulnerabilities for those trying to maintain support for the war over the long term.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 Busload migrants from Texas arrive in D.C.
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/04/13/dc-texas-migrant-bus/
GIST	<p>Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, R, carried out his plan Wednesday to bus migrants to the U.S. Capitol, saying the Biden administration has turned a “blind eye” to the record number of migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border and that Texas “should not have to bear the burden” of an influx that is expected to grow even more this year.</p> <p>The white charter bus arrived during the morning rush, delivering about two dozen migrants from Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Colombia closer to the doorstep of Fox News, NBC News and other major news outlets than to the Capitol Dome. Some were families; others traveled alone. Many were dazed, sleepless and broke.</p>

They were also thankful that Abbott had given them a free ride and trips to McDonald's, even after being told the governor is calling for them to be expelled from the United States.

"I didn't know any of that," said Victor Rodriguez, 27, a barber originally from Venezuela who said he jumped at the chance to take a free bus ride to D.C. with his wife, Ordalis, 26, and their two children, Jeremias, 5, and Luciana, 1. "The truth is, they helped us. They gave us a hand so that we could arrive here and honestly, we are very grateful."

All made the trip voluntarily, and Abbott said a second bus was on the way.

Abbott said his "busing strategy" is a direct repudiation of the Biden administration's plan to end the public health order known as Title 42 that permitted the rapid expulsion of migrants from the nation's land borders on May 23, and to resume asylum processing at the southwestern border. Republicans and some Democrats are lashing out at the Biden administration for ending the policy in an election year that could upend Democrats' tenuous hold on Congress. Border officials made more than 1 million apprehensions in the first six months of this fiscal year, and federal officials have acknowledged that after the pandemic order ends the numbers are expected to rise.

The White House has derided Abbott's plan as a publicity stunt, and the Department of Homeland Security emphasized that it has already unveiled a plan to surge officers to the border, reopen the asylum system, and transport migrants to different spots in the United States to avoid overwhelming border cities and towns such as Del Rio, Texas, where the newcomers who arrived in Washington first boarded their bus.

Del Rio was the site of a massive influx of Haitian migrants in September that overwhelmed the small city and U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents there. It became a symbol of the migration crisis and the Biden administration's complicated response to it. President Joe Biden promised to create a more "humane" immigration system, but he has kept President Donald Trump's Title 42 order in place and ended up kicking out more migrants than his predecessor. More than 1.7 million expulsions have been carried out since Trump issued the order in March 2020.

DHS officials did not comment on Texas's bus drop-off Wednesday but said the agency is "executing carefully designed plans to manage the processing and transport of noncitizens arriving at the border."

"Any individual state's interest in assisting in our plans' execution should be carefully coordinated with us," they said.

Monsignor John J. Enzler, president and CEO of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Washington, said their headquarters in Virginia alerted them that migrants might need help so they gathered Spanish-speaking workers and stood outside Union Station to help people buy bus or train tickets for the next leg of their journeys.

He said 30 migrants were on the Texas bus, and 18 already had relatives in the United States and left quickly to join them. He said that he and some of the workers helped other migrants rent a van to New York. Others were heading to Boston, Miami, and Rhode Island. Some visited a shelter to shower, eat and rest.

Enzler said he worried that the second bus would arrive late at night, when fewer people are available to help. "I hope [it's] not going to be multiple buses," he said. "We can't handle that many buses."

Some of the migrants who lingered outside Union Station said officials had approached them at a shelter in the Del Rio area after they surrendered to U.S. Customs and Border Protection after crossing the border to ask for refuge in the United States. Some had fled repression in Venezuela, others came from Cuba. Some had already escaped to countries such as Ecuador and Chile, but they said the coronavirus pandemic had damaged those economies and the United States seemed a stronger destination.

Lemay Calderón, 34, a video editor from Cuba, said he decided to travel to Mexico because efforts to oust the current regime in Cuba failed despite repeated protests last year. He said Mexican authorities had repeatedly demanded bribes so that he could approach the border, so he paid until his money ran out.

As soon as he crossed illegally, he said, he called 911.

He said he jumped at the chance for a free bus ride to D.C., en route to joining his sister in Rhode Island. He said some were offering bus trips to San Antonio from Del Rio, but they cost \$50.

"I'm very happy to be here in this beautiful city," he said, glancing at the Capitol from Union Station, where tourists boarded double-decker buses on a warm and sunny spring day. "We've arrived at a really pretty location."

Calderón, who said he considers himself a conservative, said he didn't know that Abbott wanted migrants to be expelled, but he said: "I don't criticize it because I know that you shouldn't have an open border."

"It's a contradiction," he said, adding that he was glad they let him in. But, he said, "The border was very unprotected. Anyone could get in."

Migrants said the bus trip had taken about two days. They said the bus had cushioned, reclining seats, officials on board who provided water and baby food, and free movies, but in English.

Texas emergency management officials have in recent days been meeting with local leaders and nonprofit groups in border communities to see if they would help the state recruit bus passengers. Some nonprofit leaders in San Antonio, the Rio Grande Valley and Eagle Pass, all of whom help migrants connect with family or find places to live in the United States after they've been processed by Border Patrol agents, said state officials asked them to inform migrants about the free buses, and some agreed.

W. Nim Kidd, chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management, was in Del Rio last week and at least three people with knowledge of his visit said he specifically visited the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition, the only local nonprofit group assisting migrants in the city.

The coalition has for years received migrants after they've been processed and given travel documents from Border Patrol agents. Its volunteers supply migrants with a backpack of toiletries, give them time to rest and shower, and help them arrange travel. The migrants usually use their own money or have family members pay for bus and plane tickets to their final destinations. Having the migrants at the coalition's facility on the outskirts of Del Rio gives them a safe place to wait and keeps them from having to wander the city's main avenue.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials in Del Rio said they had no role in the governor's plan. But agents regularly drop off large groups of processed migrants at the coalition's facility.

Tiffany Burrow, director of operations for the coalition, confirmed that state officials approached them in anticipation of the large numbers of people that are expected to cross the border. Del Rio provided a staging area for the buses, and state officials and Texas National Guard members assisted migrants who wanted to board the buses.

"It was completely voluntary, and also from a humanitarian side, it made sense. The people on that bus were going in that direction," Burrow said. "This was not our thing. They came to us as they went to other locations along the border."

The coalition last month helped more than 5,000 migrants representing 33 countries, she said.

Del Rio City Manager John Sheedy confirmed that they provided state emergency management officials with space in the same building where the coalition operates after they were approached by Kidd during a

	<p>meeting in neighboring Uvalde County. But the move wasn't about politics, he said, it was about taking the state up on an offer of help for a situation they have been struggling to manage for months.</p> <p>"I understand the state is trying to make a point," he said. "But the city of Del Rio is not. All we are concerned about is our capacity to move migrants out of Del Rio. We didn't want to shut down any options. Rather than thumb our nose at the state, we thought we'd let them try."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Anti-virus shutdowns in China spread
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/anti-virus-shutdowns-china-spread-infections-rise-84077100
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Anti-virus controls that have shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves.</p> <p>Shanghai is easing rules that confined most of its 25 million people to their homes after complaints they had trouble getting food. But most of its businesses still are closed. Access to Guangzhou, an industrial center of 19 million people near Hong Kong, was suspended this week. Other cities are cutting off access or closing factories and schools.</p> <p>Spring planting by Chinese farmers who feed 1.4 billion people might be disrupted, Nomura economists warned Thursday. That could boost demand for imported wheat and other food, pushing up already high global prices.</p> <p>The closures are an embarrassment to the ruling Communist Party and a setback for official efforts to shore up slumping growth in the world's second-largest economy. They come during a sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.</p> <p>Beijing has promised to reduce the human and economic cost of its "zero-COVID" strategy, but Xi on Wednesday ruled out joining the United States and other governments that are dropping restrictions and trying to live with the virus.</p> <p>"Prevention and control work cannot be relaxed," Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. "Persistence is victory."</p> <p>The risk that China might tumble into recession is increasing, Ting Lu, Jing Wang and Harrison Zhang of Nomura warned in a report.</p> <p>"The logistics crunch is worsening," they said. "The markets should also be concerned about the delayed spring planting of grain in China."</p> <p>The government reported 29,411 new cases Thursday, all but 3,020 with no symptoms. Shanghai accounted for 95% of that total, or 27,719 cases. All but 2,573 had no symptoms.</p> <p>A health official warned Wednesday that Shanghai didn't have the virus under control despite its easing restrictions.</p> <p>Some 6.6 million people were allowed to leave their homes in areas that had no new cases for at least a week. But at least 15 million others still are barred from going outdoors.</p> <p>Most people have obeyed despite grumbling about shortages of food, medicine and access to elderly relatives who need help. But videos on the popular Sina Weibo social media service show some trading punches with police.</p>

Grape Chen, a data analyst in Shanghai, said she was panicking about getting medicines for her father, who is recovering from a stroke. She called police after getting no response from an official hotline but was told quarantine rules bar officers from helping.

“We are willing to cooperate with the country,” Chen said. “But we also hope that our lives can be respected.”

The city government of Suzhou, a center for smartphone manufacturing and other high-tech industry west of Shanghai, told its 18 million people to stay home when possible.

Taiyuan, a blue-collar city of 4 million in central China, suspended inter-city bus service, according to the official China News Service. Ningde in the southeast barred residents from leaving.

A restaurant cook in Taiyuan said his family has been confined to their apartment compound since April 3 after cases were found in neighboring compounds.

“Our lives will be seriously affected if the restrictions last long,” said the cook, who would give only his surname, Chen.

“My wife and I are earning nothing,” Chen said. “We have three children to support.”

All but 13 of China’s 100 biggest cities by economic output are under some form of restrictions, according to Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm.

“The intensity is increasing,” Gavekal said in a report this week.

The volume of cargo handled by the Shanghai port, the world’s busiest, has fallen 40%, according to an estimate by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. Automakers have suspended production due to disruption in deliveries of supplies.

Restrictions on areas that produce the world's smartphones, consumer electronics and other goods are prompting forecasters to cut expectations for this year's economic growth to as low as 5%, down sharply from last year's 8.1% expansion.

The ruling party’s target is 5.5%. Growth slid to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021 after tighter official controls on debt triggered a collapse in home sales and construction, industries that support millions of jobs.

Even before the latest shutdowns, the ruling party was promising tax refunds and other help for entrepreneurs who generate wealth and jobs.

Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader and top economic official, called this week for “quicker rollout” of aid for businesses that face a “key juncture for survival,” China News Service reported.

Under a strategy dubbed “dynamic clearing,” authorities are trying to use more targeted measures to isolate neighborhoods instead of whole cities with populations bigger than some countries. But some local leaders are imposing more sweeping controls.

Shanghai leaders were criticized for trying to minimize economic damage by ordering testing but no shutdown once cases were found last month. A citywide shutdown was ordered with only a few hours' warning after case numbers soared.

That was in contrast to Shenzhen, a tech and finance center of 17.5 million people near Hong Kong that closed the city March 13 after an outbreak and ordered mass testing. It reopened a week later and business returned to normal.

	<p>Guangzhou has imitated Shenzhen. Most access to the city of 19 million was suspended Monday and mass testing ordered after 27 infections were found.</p> <p>Li Guanyu, a 31-year-old woman in Guangzhou, said residents can leave her apartment compound only once every other day to buy food but stores are well-stocked.</p> <p>“This happened a bit suddenly,” said Li. “Maybe the Shanghai situation is so bad that Guangzhou started mass testing and lockdowns as soon as cases were discovered.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Drought leaves West scrambling for water
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/expanding-drought-leaves-western-us-scrambling-water-84074736
GIST	<p>ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- Tumbleweeds drift along the Rio Grande as sand bars within its banks grow wider. Smoke from distant wildfires and dust kicked up by intense spring winds fill the valley, exacerbating the feeling of distress that is beginning to weigh on residents.</p> <p>One of North America’s longest rivers, the Rio Grande is another example of a waterway in the western U.S. that’s tapped out.</p> <p>From the Pacific Northwest to the Colorado River Basin, irrigation districts already are warning farmers to expect less this year despite growing demands fueled by ever-drying conditions. Climate experts say March marked the third straight month of below-average precipitation across the U.S. and areas of record dryness are expanding in the West.</p> <p>On Thursday, federal water managers are scheduled to share their annual operating plan for the Rio Grande, a major water source for millions people and thousands of square miles of farmland in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. Its outlook is expected to be similarly bleak.</p> <p>Mark Garcia, who farms about 400 acres (160 hectares) with his family in Valencia County, just south of Albuquerque, ran the numbers. He has a degree in mathematics and taught calculus for years before retiring and turning to the farm full time.</p> <p>He found his family would be compensated for not irrigating about half of its acreage this year, and more water would be left in the river to help New Mexico work off a debt that has been growing as the state falls short of its obligations to deliver water to neighboring Texas.</p> <p>“Logically, it was almost like a no-brainer,” Garcia said of opting into the fallowing program. “The risk analysis was, I had to take it, I had to do it. I didn’t want to, though.”</p> <p>Sitting in his backhoe in one of his fields, Garcia began to get emotional. He said he grew up watching his dad farm the land.</p> <p>“I was born into this,” he said. “The hard thing for me is I feel like I don’t want the government to pay for me not to work. I have an issue with that.”</p> <p>The state of New Mexico and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District are hoping more farmers can make that tough choice — at least long enough to help managers address the pending water debt.</p> <p>Even the conservancy district, which oversees irrigation from Cochiti Dam south to Elephant Butte Reservoir, acknowledges it’s a temporary solution.</p> <p>Casey Ish, a water resources specialist with the district, said over 200 irrigators have enrolled, and officials are targeting fields that are less productive or need to be rested.</p>

“For us, this is just one tool and one way the district is trying to help the state manage the state’s compact debt, but we certainly don’t anticipate pulling a third or half the district into a fallowing program year over year,” Ish said. “That’s not sustainable from a price point or an ag point.”

Thursday's virtual meeting will include estimates of how much the Bureau of Reclamation will have to work with this season based on spring runoff predictions and current reservoir levels.

With below-average snow cover and reservoirs in some places reaching critically low levels, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration noted in its most recent monthly climate report that concerns are mounting that the western drought will intensify.

On the Colorado River, the U.S. Interior Department recently proposed holding back water in Lake Powell to maintain Glen Canyon Dam’s ability to generate electricity amid what it said were the driest conditions in the region in more than 1,200 years.

The potential impacts to lower basin states that could see their water supplies reduced — California, Nevada and Arizona — aren’t yet known. But the conundrum speaks to the wide-ranging functions of Lake Powell and Glen Canyon Dam, and the need to quickly pivot to confront climate change.

In the Pacific Northwest, experts are predicting one of the driest summers on record, noting that nearly 71% of the region made up of Oregon, Washington and Idaho is in drought and nearly one-quarter is already experiencing extreme drought.

An irrigation district that supplies more than 1,000 farmers and ranchers on the California-Oregon border announced earlier this week that they would get a fraction of their normal water allocation this year due to drought. It’s the third consecutive year that severe drought has impacted farmers, fish and tribes in a region where there’s not enough water to satisfy competing demands.

Irrigation districts that supply water to farmers along the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico and along the Pecos in the east also are promising short seasons.

Just north of the New Mexico-Colorado border, farmers in the San Luis Valley turned on their spigots April 1, drawing on their share of the Rio Grande. Water managers in New Mexico immediately saw the gauges drop, meaning less water ultimately will make its way to central New Mexico.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Carbon capture: tool or ‘false solution’?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/carbon-capture-key-decarbonizing-tool-false-solution-84058888
GIST	<p>Polly Glover realized her son had asthma when he was nine months old. Now 26, he carries an inhaler in his pocket whenever he’s out and about in Prairieville, Louisiana, part of Ascension Parish.</p> <p>“He probably needs to leave Ascension quite frankly,” Glover says, but he hasn’t because “this is his home and this is our family and this is our community.”</p> <p>The parish is part of the 85-mile (137-kilometer) span between New Orleans and Baton Rouge officially called the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor, more commonly known as Cancer Alley. The region's air quality is some of the worst in the United States, and in several places along the corridor, cancer risks are much higher than levels considered acceptable by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.</p> <p>Glover says the air is “terrible” where she lives, but there’s also great biodiversity — osprey, eagles, migratory birds, deer, rabbits, fish and alligators — among the region's lakes, rivers and wetlands. The environmental advocate has been working for 30 years to preserve the place she’s loved since childhood.</p>

That's why she is wary of anything that might make air quality worse or threaten wildlife — and her biggest fear now is that a \$4.5 billion plant designed to capture climate-changing carbon and make clean-burning hydrogen fuel will actually do more harm to the Lake Maurepas basin.

The blue hydrogen energy plant is slated to be built and operated by Air Products and Chemicals, a multinational petrochemical company. The company says the plant will capture airborne carbon emissions created during production and put them safely underground — a process called carbon capture and storage.

“Sometimes I think people think you're kind of bubbling this in at the bottom of the lake,” said Simon Moore, vice president of investor relations, corporate relations and sustainability at Air Products. “You know, this is a mile below the Earth's surface, where the geological formation of the rock has this porous space, which simply absorbs the CO₂.”

Still, Glover is worried. “I'm not a scientist. I'm a mom who cares,” she said. “We have got to be better stewards of the environment and while reducing carbon emissions is necessary, injecting them into the basin is not the answer.”

There are several other carbon capture and storage projects proposed or in the works throughout the U.S., including in Louisiana, Texas, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa and California. Companies behind them maintain they can successfully remove carbon from the air to reduce pollution, then safely transport and store the carbon underground — or do both.

In some cases, oil and gas companies are banking on this new technology to either help build new profit centers, such as plants that make hydrogen, or extend the lifespan of their fossil fuel facilities.

Carbon capture and storage projects are gaining traction since Congress approved \$3.5 billion for them last year. The Global CCS Institute, a think tank seeking to advance these projects globally, called it the “single largest appropriation of money for CCS in the history of the technology.”

In the latest report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's top scientists said carbon capture and storage technology has to be part of the range of solutions to decarbonize and mitigate climate change. But they said solar and wind energy and electricity storage are improving faster than carbon capture and storage.

Opponents of carbon capture and storage maintain the technology is unproven and has been less effective than alternatives such as solar and wind at decarbonizing the energy sector.

“Carbon capture is neither workable nor feasible,” said Basav Sen, climate justice policy director for the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank based in Washington, D.C. “It's merely an excuse for the fossil fuel industry to keep operating the way it does.”

A study in late 2020 by researchers from the University of California, San Diego, found over 80% of 39 projects that have sought to commercialize carbon capture and storage ended in failure. The study cited lack of technological readiness as a top factor

But even if the technology was deployed successfully, several critics say the projects would pose threats to the public health of communities long plagued by air and water pollution.

First, they said any project that prolongs the lifespan of an existing industrial facility presents additional environmental harm by extending the amount of time it pollutes a community, which the IPCC report confirms.

Second, they noted that since carbon capture would require more energy to power the equipment, it would result in more air pollution because the technology can only catch a portion of the carbon emitted by a facility.

Howard Herzog, a senior research engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and pioneer of carbon capture and storage technology, disputed this in an interview with the Associated Press. But he acknowledged there is a risk in transporting and storing carbon.

In 2020, a pipeline carrying compressed carbon dioxide ruptured in the town of Satartia, Mississippi, which caused over 40 people to get hospital treatment and more than 300 to evacuate. The incident is cited by experts, advocates and residents who live near proposed carbon capture and storage projects to illustrate potential dangers of transporting carbon long distances.

Injecting carbon underground for storage could end up contaminating aquifers, according to Nikki Reisch, director of the climate and energy program for the Center for International Environmental Law.

Over 500 environmental organizations, including the law center, signed an open letter published in the Washington Post in July 2021, calling carbon capture and storage a “false solution.”

In response, the Carbon Capture Coalition, which advocates the technology, released its own letter in August with over 100 signatories. They pressed Congress to include investment in carbon capture and storage in any upcoming legislation.

Matt Fry, a state and regional policy manager with the Great Plains Institute, a Minneapolis-based climate and energy think tank, told AP the technology is essential to meeting mid-century climate goals.

“The potential for a completely decarbonized, electrified world is a reality,” Fry said. “But we’re going to need to transition to get there. And it’s going to require carbon capture to address those emissions.”

At the point of capture, Herzog said, the technology poses a “very low” threat to public health. “There’s always a chance of some mishaps,” he added, “but on the overall scale of chemical plants, (the technology) is fairly benign.”

Still, residents near proposed projects worry.

In California’s Central Valley agricultural region, Chevron, Microsoft and Schlumberger New Energy are collaborating to build a facility in the town of Mendota that will create energy by converting agricultural waste into carbon monoxide and hydrogen gas, then mixing it with oxygen to generate electricity with the promise of capturing 99% of the carbon from the process.

Chevron said it plans to inject the carbon “underground into nearby deep geologic formations.”

That’s concerning for Nayamin Martinez, who lives in the valley and is director of the Central California Environmental Justice Network. “That worries us a lot,” she said. “What does that mean in terms of risk for contamination of drinking water?”

Creighton Welch, a spokesperson for Chevron, said the process they plan to use is safe. “CO2 capture, injection, and storage are not new technologies and have been conducted safely for decades,” Welch said.

Back in Louisiana, Glover and other residents also fear carbon capture technology will affect the water. The carbon dioxide captured at the Air Products and Chemicals facility will be stored in sites such as under Lake Maurepas, an important wetland.

Kim Coates, who lives on the lake’s northeast side, said it’s a buffer between the Gulf of Mexico and residents. But she said she’s witnessed generations of destruction to that ecosystem through industrial development and, more recently, hurricanes and tropical storms.

Now Coates fears more of the same if carbon is stored under the lake. “We’ve seen the destruction over time with no one looking forward to what was going to happen in the future,” she said.

HEADLINE	04/14 Ukraine: missiles hit Russian flag ship
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/neighbors-back-ukraine-demand-accountability-war-crimes-84074356
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Ukrainian forces said they hit and badly damaged the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, and Russia said its crew was forced to evacuate as a result of a fire without acknowledging an attack, as the battle shifts east and around the battered city of Mariupol where the defenders were still holding out.</p> <p>The governor of the Odesa region, Maksym Marchenko, said the Ukrainians struck the guided-missile cruiser Moskva with two missiles and caused "serious damage."</p> <p>Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed the ship was damaged but not that it was hit by Ukraine — it said ammunition on board detonated as a result of a fire of as-yet undetermined causes. The entire crew was evacuated, it added; the cruiser typically has about 500 on board.</p> <p>If confirmed, the sinking of the cruiser would be a major blow to Russia, after the tank carrier Orsk was hit and set on fire in an attack in Berdyansk in the Sea of Azov late last month.</p> <p>The reported ship attack by Neptune cruise missiles came a day after President Joe Biden called Russia's actions in Ukraine "a genocide" and approved \$800 million in new military assistance to Kyiv, saying weapons from the West have sustained Ukraine's fight so far and "we cannot rest now." The munitions include artillery systems, armored personnel carriers and helicopters.</p> <p>Russia invaded on Feb. 24 with the goal, according to Western officials, of taking Kyiv, toppling the government and installing a Moscow-friendly replacement. But the ground advance slowly stalled and Russia lost potentially thousands of fighters. The conflict has killed untold numbers of Ukrainian civilians and forced millions more to flee. It also has rattled the world economy, threatened global food supplies and shattered Europe's post-Cold War balance.</p> <p>The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia showed their support to Ukraine on a visit Wednesday to war-ravaged areas and demanded accountability for what they called war crimes. They meet with their counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and visited Borodyanka, one of the towns near Kyiv where evidence of atrocities was found after Russian troops withdrew to focus on the country's east.</p> <p>"There are no doubts that they committed war crimes. And for that, they should be accountable," Latvian President Egils Levits said.</p> <p>The Lithuanian president, Gitanas Nausėda, added: "The fight for Europe's future is happening here." He called for tougher sanctions, including against Russian oil and gas shipments and all the country's banks.</p> <p>In one of the most crucial battles of the war in the southern port city of Mariupol, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 1,026 troops from the Ukrainian 36th Marine Brigade surrendered at a metals factory. But Vadym Denysenko, adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, rejected the claim, telling Current Time TV that "the battle over the seaport is still ongoing today."</p> <p>Russian troops are gearing up for a major offensive in the eastern Donbas region, where Moscow-allied separatists and Ukrainian forces have been fighting since 2014. Mariupol is a key piece in the Russian campaign and lies in the Donbas, which the Russians have pummeled for weeks.</p> <p>It was unclear when a surrender may have occurred or how many forces were still defending Mariupol.</p> <p>Russian state television broadcast footage Wednesday that it said was from Mariupol showing dozens of men in camouflage walking with their hands up and carrying others on stretchers or in chair holds. One</p>

man held a white flag. In the background was a tall industrial building with its windows shattered and roof missing, identified by the broadcaster as the Iliich metalworks.

A U.N. task force warned that the war threatens to devastate the economies of many developing countries that are facing even higher food and energy costs and increasingly difficult financial conditions. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the war is “supercharging” a crisis in food, energy and finance in poorer countries that were already struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and a lack of access to funding.

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy noted that the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court visited the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, which was controlled by Russian forces until recently and where evidence of mass killings and more than 400 bodies were found.

“It is inevitable that the Russian troops will be held responsible. We will drag everyone to a tribunal, and not only for what was done in Bucha,” Zelenskyy said late Wednesday.

He also said work was continuing to clear tens of thousands of unexploded shells, mines and trip wires left in northern Ukraine by the departing Russians. He urged people returning to homes to be wary of any unfamiliar objects and report them to police.

Also Wednesday, a report commissioned by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe found “clear patterns of (international humanitarian law) violations by the Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities.” It was written by experts selected by Ukraine and published by the Vienna-based organization, which promotes security and human rights.

The report said there were also violations by Ukraine, but concluded those committed by Russia “are by far larger in scale and nature.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin has denied his troops committed atrocities, saying Tuesday that Moscow “had no other choice” but to invade and would “continue until its full completion and the fulfillment of the tasks that have been set.” He insisted Russia’s campaign was going as planned despite a major withdrawal after its forces failed to take the capital and suffered significant losses.

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HEADLINE	04/12 Iran ‘ghost ships’; \$22B illicit oil to China
SOURCE	https://freebeacon.com/national-security/iranian-ghost-armada-ferries-22-billion-worth-of-illicit-oil-to-china/
GIST	<p>Iran's fleet of "ghost ships" has ferried at least \$22 billion worth of illicit oil to China since 2021, providing the hardline regime with a major source of revenue and raising questions about the Biden administration's lax enforcement of sanctions.</p> <p>In the first three months of 2022 alone, Iran shipped an average of 829,260 barrels of oil per day to China, according to new figures published by United Against a Nuclear Iran (UANI), an advocacy group that closely tracks Tehran's fleet of illegal tankers. A total of 337,882,520 illegal barrels—worth approximately \$22 billion—have made their way to Beijing since President Joe Biden took office.</p> <p>Iran's fleet, comprised of 182 foreign-owned and -flagged ships, operates with little interference from the United States, according to UANI. It is known as Tehran's "ghost armada" because these ships often obfuscate their position at sea and turn off their trackers—a violation of maritime law—so that they can evade detection.</p> <p>Iran's black market oil trade has thrived under the Biden administration, fueling accusations the United States is turning a blind eye to sanctions enforcement in order to generate goodwill with Tehran as part of a diplomatic effort to ink a revamped nuclear deal.</p>

UANI is outing the companies that own these ships as part of an effort to push the Biden administration into taking action. Four of the most active ships in Iran's fleet—*VIGOR*, *VIRGO*, *HORNET*, and *BERG I*—are known to be operated by Atlantic Navigation, an India-based company that is linked to entities the United States has sanctioned for supporting Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the country's paramilitary fighting force, which is responsible for killing hundreds of Americans.

"During the time the four vessels mentioned were being operated by Atlantic Navigation, they carried just over 19 million barrels of Iranian oil, worth approximately \$1 billion, to China," UANI chief of staff Claire Jungman told the *Washington Free Beacon*. "This money allows the Iranian regime to profit and in turn fund its terrorist activities around the world. There are clear ties between these vessels and sanctioned entities, and there is no good reason for the Biden administration to have turned a blind eye to this. This lack of action by the Biden administration is only enabling Iran's bad behavior."

The latest information about these ships and their owners reveals a tangled corporate web of shell companies that makes it difficult for U.S. authorities to determine who is responsible and how sanctions should apply.

"In our ongoing efforts to assist authorities, UANI has conducted investigations into the real owners of the Ghost Armada vessels," the group said in a recently [published](#) investigation. "Using official public records and other open-source data, our research to date has uncovered a web of front companies and facilitators that ultimately point back to Iran."

The four vessels responsible for delivering oil to China and operated by Atlantic Navigation are tied to sanctioned entities through a complicated web of foreign companies.

Atlantic Navigation's director is Vijaykumar Mishra, who also serves in this role at two other shipping companies that have been sanctioned by the United States, Vaniya Ship Management and 12 Degree Ship Management. Both were hit with sanctions in September 2019 for operating on behalf of another Iran-linked entity called the Mehdi Group.

The Mehdi Group is run by Ali Zaheer Mehdi, whom the United States designated for providing material support to the IRGC, according to UANI's investigation.

"Although Atlantic Navigation is only listed as the current technical manager for one of the four vessels mentioned above, it is very relevant to our investigation of this sanctions evasion scheme," UANI explained. "We have found that all of the new companies managing these vessels may still be tied to sanctioned entities, which is not surprising as we often see collaboration between entities on sanctions evasion and other illicit shipping schemes."

The watchdog group says it will disclose additional material about this sanctions-evasion scheme in the coming weeks.

A State Department spokesman told the *Free Beacon* the department is aware of China's importation of illicit Iranian oil and that sanctions "remain in effect unless and until they are lifted, and we will address any effort at sanctions evasion."

"We have used our sanctions authorities to respond to Iranian sanctions evasion efforts, including those involving China, and will continue to do so as necessary," the spokesman said, adding that U.S. officials are also addressing the issue directly with China.

"We have been approaching this diplomatically with the Chinese as part of our dialogue on Iran policy and part of our diplomatic effort to achieve a mutual return to full compliance with the JCPOA," the State Department spokesman said, referring to the 2015 nuclear accord by its acronym. "We think that in general this is a more effective path forward to address our concerns."

Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/13 Hackers steal \$11M from DeFi platform
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/hackers-steal-more-than-11-million-from-elephant-money-defi-platform/
GIST	<p>Elephant Money, the decentralized finance (DeFi) protocol behind the ELEPHANT token and the TRUNK stablecoin, announced this week that hackers stole \$11.2 million worth of Binance Coin.</p> <p>The company said it was facing an “automated attack” against its treasury and in a Medium post, their founder said they are working with their partners – blockchain security company CertiK and DeFi insurance protocol InsurAce – to address the issue.</p> <p>“It took a significant amount of capital to bust through the system’s defenses. Over \$261M in volume,” the founder said.</p> <p>“Every time bad actors win it hurts the entire space. There are prominent teams that were aware of weaknesses and stood by and did nothing at your expense. Even after I and other community members asked them to disclose.”</p> <p>Several blockchain security companies, like BlocSec and PeckShield, released threads on Twitter about how the platform was exploited.</p> <p>BlocSec said the hackers used a price manipulation attack to exploit the platform. They borrowed wrapped Binance Coin through a flash loan and traded it for thousands of ELEPHANT Tokens.</p> <p>The attackers minted TRUNK stablecoins, raising the price of ELEPHANT tokens. They eventually traded in ELEPHANT and TRUNK tokens for Binance Coin and Binance’s US Dollar stablecoin BUSD.</p> <p>“Since the token value after the attack is more than the cost, the attacker can get around \$4 million profit in one round of the attack,” BlocSec said, noting that the attacker simply repeated this process to steal more funds.</p> <p>Elephant Money said its BUSD treasury has been tapped to rebuild the ELEPHANT Treasury and that a patch for the vulnerability is being worked on.</p> <p>They urged users not to sell their ELEPHANT tokens, claiming those who do will “realize unnecessary losses.”</p> <p>“Elephant Money has defended against all manner of attacks since its inception a year ago,” the founder said. “This exploit got through and its delivery was planned and timed.”</p> <p>The price of ELEPHANT has tanked since the attack, dropping more than 76%, according to Binance.</p> <p>Blockchain analysis firm Chainalysis said at least \$2.2 billion was stolen from DeFi protocols in 2021. Two weeks ago, the Ronin Network announced that hackers stole more than \$600 million worth of cryptocurrency, making it one of the largest attacks ever.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Omnicom ‘suspicious’ IT incident
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/omnicom-cyber-outtage-mcdonalds-apple/
GIST	<p>Omnicom, one of the world’s largest marketing and advertising agencies, took some of its IT systems offline over the “past week” due to “suspicious activity,” the company confirmed to CyberScoop Wednesday.</p>

	<p>Several employees affected by the outage said that they were unable to access their virtual private network service, and some couldn't access email. The employees worked at different Omnicom subsidiaries.</p> <p>“Omnicom is in the process of reviewing our VPN systems that were taken offline as a precaution after detecting suspicious activity that we quickly isolated and responded to,” Joanne Trout, chief communications officer at Omnicom, wrote in an email to CyberScoop. “We have brought most systems back online and are working with our information technology team to ensure all systems are quickly and securely restored.”</p> <p>Omnicom declined to say how many individuals were affected by the outage.</p> <p>Omnicom, a U.S.-based global company, generates \$14.29 billion a year, making it the second-largest global advertising firm by some estimates. Omnicom and its subsidiaries represent 5,000 clients in more than 70 countries, including McDonald's, Apple, Unilever and Johnson & Johnson.</p> <p>Omnicom Media Group was hit by a cyberattack last year that disrupted parts of its IT networks, AdAge reported. The firm told AdAge that no data was at risk of compromise.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 DHS: attack on undersea cable foiled
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/undersea-cable-operator-hacked-hawaii/
GIST	<p>Federal agents in Honolulu last week “disrupted” an apparent cyberattack on an unnamed telecommunication company’s servers associated with an underwater cable responsible for internet, cable service and cell connections in Hawaii and the region, the agency said in a statement Tuesday.</p> <p>Hawaii-based agents with Homeland Security Investigations, an arm of the Department of Homeland Security, received a tip from their mainland HSI counterparts that led to the disruption of a “significant breach involving a private company’s servers associated with an undersea cable.” The investigation revealed that “an international hacking group” was behind the attack, and “HSI agents and international law enforcement partners in several countries were able to make an arrest.”</p> <p>The statement did not identify the type of cyberattack alleged to have occurred, the hacking group responsible, the other law enforcement agencies or where any arrests took place. No damage or disruption occurred, and there is no immediate threat, the statement said.</p> <p>John Tobon, HSI’s special agent in charge in Hawaii, told a local news station that investigators found that the attackers had obtained credentials that allowed access to an unnamed company’s systems.</p> <p>“It could have been something to just create havoc, in other words, just shut down communications, or it could have been used to target individuals in ransomware-type schemes,” he said.</p> <p>As much as 95% of intercontinental internet data flows via hundreds of “submarine” internet cables, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The cables are owned and operated by combinations of private and state-owned entities, and are facing increasing risks to their security and resilience, according to an Atlantic Council report published in September 2021.</p> <p>That report’s author, Justin Sherman, outlines concerns such as authoritarian governments’ desire to control internet access, in part, by manipulating physical infrastructure such as the submarine lines. The lines are also attractive targets for surreptitious monitoring by government or criminal groups looking to steal sensitive data.</p> <p>But another threat, Sherman wrote in a blog post summarizing his report, is that more cable operators are using remote management systems for cable networks. “Many of these systems have poor security, which exposes cables to new levels of cybersecurity risk,” he wrote. “Hackers could break into these internet-</p>

	<p>connected systems from anywhere in the world and physically manipulate cable signals, causing them to drop off entirely — undermining the flow of internet data to specific parts of the world.”</p> <p>Sherman added that the ever-present ransomware threat is acute with respect to these lines: “One can even imagine a threat actor (state or non-state) hacking into a cable management system and trying to hold the infrastructure hostage.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Insurance firms increasingly fall prey
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/insurance-companies-increasingly-fall-prey-to-cyberattacks
GIST	<p>For many years, cybercriminals have focused their attacks on banks, credit unions and investment firms. But given the bounty of information held by insurance companies, it was only a matter of time before hackers started going after traditional insurance companies.</p> <p>In March 2020, one of the most notable breaches to hit the industry came to light, when it was made public that Chubb, one of the largest insurance companies in the world, had been hit by a ransomware attack. The New Jersey-based insurance company had fallen victim to Maze ransomware, a particularly sophisticated variant known to spread like wildfire throughout a network, and difficult to root out.</p> <p>As if foreshadowing this highly publicized incident, Digital Guardian released a report in January 2020 pointing out the growth that it was starting to see in insurance company cyber-intrusions. (And, ironically, Chubb had put out its own cyber-awareness report the year before, called Cyber Attack Inevitability.)</p> <p>“We are arriving at the place where any digitized business can become a target of a cyberattack,” said John Horn, practice director for cybersecurity at Aite-Novarica. “Insurance companies are no exception.”</p> <p>Last month, Armorblox reported a scam directed at employees of a large, unnamed insurance company, where bad actors impersonated Instagram support staff and sent emails with a malware payload attached in effort to get into the insurance company’s systems.</p> <p>“For criminal teams with primary motivation of financial gain, there has been observed a pattern of attacking firms which hold cyber underwriting contracts, so that cyberattacks can have a predictable payoff,” Horn said.</p> <p>“Client lists held by insurance companies are quite valuable to cybercriminals, as they help identify compelling client targets,” Horn continued. “Thus, insurance companies should expect cyberattacks.”</p> <p>While he does not see the increased ramp-up in known attacks on insurance companies as indicative of any particular trend, Sam Curry, chief security officer for Cybereason, said that there has been at least “a slight increase in the temperature insurance carries in comparison to late last year.”</p> <p>“That doesn't mean that they won't get more targeted — it only means that it’s largely 'business as usual,' without changes in cyber intensity,” Curry said.</p> <p>Ironically, Curry pointed out the insurance industry in general “has been scrambling in their business models to build actuarial tables and to price cyber insurance correctly, and they have themselves been targeted by various players in the ecosystem for years.”</p> <p>Earlier this year, Aite-Novarica interviewed a dozen insurance company chief information security officers (CISOs) to better understand how they approached cyberattacks, and tried to mitigate them. One universal theme that came across from this research was that “insurance company CISOs have cybersecurity needs much like a bank CISO,” Horn said. “Most all the cybersecurity principles used by a bank CISO are needed by today’s insurance CISO, as well.”</p>

	<p>Hence, Horn advised that insurance companies need to embrace a similar approach and to mitigate cyber risk in a similar manner as other financial institutions.</p> <p>In other words, if they have not done so already, insurance companies need to establish a formal risk assessment and a “robust cyber risk program which includes aspects such as defense in depth, zero-trust architectures, data security, identity, multi-factor authentication, security operations and risk management governance.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Ransomware claims trending down
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/ransomware-claims-trending-downward-insurance-firm-says
GIST	<p>“Ransomware attacks are down from recent peaks, as costs and frequency of claims trend downward,” is the headline introduction to a new Risk Insights Index. This would appear to be welcome news to an embattled industry.</p> <p>The claim is made by the Corvus cyber insurance firm based on a rather dramatic reduction in ransomware insurance claims in the last quarter of 2021. “Based on Corvus’s claims data, after all of the dire headlines throughout 2021 the end of the year presented signs of improvement: In Q4, the rate of ransomware claims reached just half of the peak seen in Q1 2021 — decreasing from 0.6% to 0.3%.”</p> <p>The idea that this is a downward ‘trend’ is given further weight by an early look at results from Q1, 2022. Corvus observed a 30% reduction in ransomware claims frequency from Q4 2021 to Q1 2022 (through March 15), highlighting the fractured ransomware threat ecosystem during a time of war. The full effect of the Russia/Ukraine war on the ransomware ecosystem, however, will only be understood through the lens of history in the future.</p> <p>All that can be said for now is that ransomware claims experienced by Corvus were lower in Q4 2021 than in the previous quarters of 2021. This is a good and positive sign. “This decrease in cost and severity can be partially attributed to underwriting entities requiring stronger backups for insurance coverage, which is helping to drive the broader trend toward more sophisticated and resilient approaches to mitigating ransomware risk.”</p> <p>Overstressing the importance of backup alone in ransomware mitigation carries its own risks. Better backup has been a major and successful response to ransomware for several years. But it is considered a primary driver for the criminal move to ‘double extortion’ in ransomware. Backup alone offers no defense against the exposure of sensitive data and subsequent blackmail. This is an altogether more complex area for insurance to cover.</p> <p>The primary costs involved in sensitive data exposure are reputational damage and potential regulatory fines. These are difficult to quantify and consequently difficult to insure. SecurityWeek asked Corvus if it requires any data protection requirements in the same way as it requires data backup.</p> <p>“Underwriters regularly ask questions about the redundancy of sensitive or business critical data and how that data is protected,” replied Lauren Winchester, VP of risk and response at Corvus Insurance. “A cyber underwriter will want to know how many copies of that data a company keeps and in what form, whether that data is encrypted at rest, and whether credentials that can access and/or alter that data are protected with multi factor authentication (to name a few controls).”</p> <p>We know empirically, however, that while good data hygiene can reduce the risk of compromise, it cannot eliminate it. The question then becomes one of whether insurance can cover the costs of sensitive data loss.</p> <p>Winchester is optimistic. “Cyber insurance really has its genesis in covering the costs of investigating and responding to a possible compromise of personally identifiable information (PII) or protected health</p>

information (PHI),” she told SecurityWeek. “Cyber policies also often contain coverages for regulatory fines and harm to reputation.”

In short, insurance companies have a history of covering customers for loss of data and reputational damage. But ransomware data extortion is different than the insurance genesis of a few years ago. The extortion can be ongoing. The criminals can keep coming back asking for more money because they still have the data – and how the insurance companies respond to this has yet to be settled.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that cyber insurance is an important tool for ransomware cyber risk management, nor that Q4 2021 was a good month for Corvus. But whether ransomware is really trending down (with the implication that cyber insurance is winning the battle against ransomware) remains questionable.

Avast supports the Corvus view that ransomware was down in Q4 2021, but for different reasons. Jakub Kroustek, Malware Research Director, commented, “The havoc ransomware caused in the first three quarters of 2021 triggered a coordinated cooperation of nations, government agencies, and security vendors to hunt down ransomware authors and operators, and we believe all of this resulted in a significant decrease in ransomware attacks in Q4/2021. The ransomware risk ratio decreased by an impressive 28% compared to Q3/2021. We hope to see a continuation of this trend in Q1/2022, but we are also prepared for the opposite.”

He added, “This doesn’t mean the decline is permanent, instead it indicates that ransomware authors and operators are increasingly switching to targeted attacks on bigger organizations and institutions rather than high-volume, spray and pray techniques of the past.”

ESET sees the opposite: “a decline in the activity of the gangs engaged in big-game hunting.” Igor Kabina, senior detection engineer at ESET, told SecurityWeek, “We can also expect the emergence of new players who will try to take the vacated place after the actors that closed shop or were arrested. The reason is simple - and ransomware and extortion businesses are far too lucrative to abandon.”

ESET’s view is confirmed by CISA. In February 2022 it issued a ransomware alert that stated, “In the first half of 2021, cybersecurity authorities in the United States and Australia observed ransomware threat actors targeting ‘big game’ organizations – i.e., perceived high-value organizations and/or those that provide critical services – in several high-profile incidents. These victims included Colonial Pipeline Company, JBS Foods, and Kaseya Limited. However, ransomware groups suffered disruptions from U.S. authorities in mid-2021. Subsequently, the FBI observed some ransomware threat actors redirecting ransomware efforts away from ‘big-game’ and toward mid-sized victims to reduce scrutiny.”

The Corvus analysis of its own telemetry indicates a reduction in the number of ransomware claims in Q4 2021. This is a good thing, and demonstrates a success for the Corvus business. This success, however, should not be taken as indicative of a downward trend in ransomware. More likely it is a blip while criminals do what they always do – adapt to changing circumstances.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Wind turbine giant hit by cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/wind-turbine-nordex-cyber-attack/
GIST	<p>German wind turbine manufacturer, Nordex Group, was hit by a cyber-attack on 31 March 2022, with an update issued by the firm this week.</p> <p>The cyber-attack was detected by IT security team at an early stage, according to Nordex, and response measures were taken quickly.</p> <p>Nordex revealed that the necessary response protocols were taken and IT systems across multiple locations and business units were shut down.</p>

	<p>In a statement, the company said: “To safeguard customer assets, remote access from Nordex Group IT infrastructure was disabled for turbines under contract.</p> <p>“Nordex turbines continued operating without restrictions and wind farm communication with grid operators and energy traders was, and remains, unaffected.”</p> <p>Nordex implemented alternative remote control services for the majority of its fleet.</p> <p>Internal and external IT experts are currently investigating the cyber-attack, with preliminary results suggesting that the cyber-attack only affected internal IT infrastructure.</p> <p>“There is no indication that the incident spread to any third-party assets or otherwise beyond Nordex’s internal IT infrastructure,” Nordex said in its statement.</p> <p>The company is currently restoring IT systems and warned that the shutdown might affect customers, employees and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The growing use of green energy is likely to become an increasingly tempting target for cyber-criminals over the coming years. Last November, world’s largest manufacturer of wind turbines, Vestas Wind Systems, was forced to shut down IT systems across several locations over the weekend after a cybersecurity incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Data breach disclosures surge 14%
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-breach-disclosures-surge-14/
GIST	<p>The number of publicly reported data breaches in the US increased by double digits year-on-year in the first three months of 2022, according to the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC).</p> <p>The non-profit claimed that the increase represents the third successive year in which Q1 figures have exceeded those recorded 12 months previously.</p> <p>The vast majority (92%) of breaches recorded by the ITRC were traced back to cyber-attacks, with phishing and ransomware the top two causes overall.</p> <p>However, there remains a gap in reporting, as 154 data breach notices, or around 40%, did not include the root cause. This made “unknown” the largest attack vector in Q1 2022.</p> <p>It represents a 40% increase in the total number of unknown breach causes compared to full-year 2021, with the ITRC warning that this lack of transparency is a risk to consumers and organizations.</p> <p>System and human error represented 8% of data compromises in the period, while those resulting from physical attacks, including document or device theft and skimming devices, numbered just three.</p> <p>Healthcare, financial services, manufacturing and utilities and professional services were the sectors that suffered the most breaches in Q1 2022.</p> <p>Eva Velasquez, President and CEO of the ITRC, explained that Q1 typically accounts for the lowest number of data breaches in the year.</p> <p>“The fact the number of breach events in Q1 represents a double-digit increase over the same time last year is another indicator that data compromises will continue to rise in 2022 after setting a new all-time high in 2021,” she added.</p> <p>“We saw an alarming number of data breaches last year due to highly complex and sophisticated cyber-attacks that are fueling the dramatic rise in identity fraud. It is vital everyone continues to practice good</p>

	cyber-hygiene, to help reduce the amount of personal information flowing into the hands of cyber-thieves.”
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HEADLINE	04/13 New Fodcha DDoS botnet
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-fodcha-ddos-botnet-targets-over-100-victims-every-day/
GIST	<p>A rapidly growing botnet is ensnaring routers, DVRs, and servers across the Internet to target more than 100 victims every day in distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks.</p> <p>This newly discovered malware, named Fodcha by researchers at Qihoo 360's Network Security Research Lab (360 Netlab), has spread to over 62,000 devices between March 29 and April 10.</p> <p>The number of unique IP addresses linked to the botnet also oscillates, with 360 Netlab saying that they're tracking a 10,000-strong Fodcha army of bots using Chinese IP addresses every day, most of them using the services of China Unicom (59.9%) and China Telecom (39.4%).</p> <p>"Based on direct data from the security community that we worked with, the number of daily live bots are more than 56000," Netlab said.</p> <p>"The global infection looks fairly big as just in China there are more than 10,000 daily active bots (IPs) and also more than 100 DDoS victims being targeted on a daily basis."</p> <p>Spreads via exploits and brute-force attacks</p> <p>The Fodcha infects new devices using exploits designed to abuse n-day vulnerabilities in multiple devices and a brute-force cracking tool dubbed Crazyfia.</p> <p>The list of devices and services targeted by the Fodcha botnet includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Android: Android ADB Debug Server RCE • GitLab: CVE-2021-22205 • Realtek Jungle SDK: CVE-2021-35394 • MVPower DVR: JAWS Webserver unauthenticated shell command execution • LILIN DVR: LILIN DVR RCE • TOTOLINK Routers: TOTOLINK Routers Backdoor • ZHONE Router: ZHONE Router Web RCE <p>Fodcha operators use Crazyfia scan results to deploy malware payload after successfully gaining access to vulnerable Internet-exposed devices samples on the vulnerable devices.</p> <p>As 360 Netlab further discovered, the botnet samples target MIPS, MPSL, ARM, x86, and other CPU architectures.</p> <p>Since January 2022, the botnet has been using the folded[.]in command-and-control (C2) domain up to March 19 when it switched to fridgexperts[.]cc after the cloud vendor took down the initial C2 domain.</p> <p>"The shift from v1 to v2 is due to the fact that the C2 servers corresponding to the v1 version were shutdown by a their cloud vendor, so Fodcha's operators had no choice but to re-launch v2 and update C2," the researchers concluded.</p> <p>"The new C2 is mapped to more than a dozen IPs and is distributed across multiple countries including the US, Korea, Japan, and India, it involves more cloud providers such as Amazon, DediPath, DigitalOcean, Linode, and many others."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 African banks targeted by Remcos RAT
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/african-banks-heavily-targeted-in-remcosrat-malware-campaigns/
GIST	<p>African banks are increasingly targeted by malware distribution campaigns that employ HTML smuggling tricks and typo-squatted domains to drop remote access trojans (RATs).</p> <p>Cybercriminals interested in quick financial gains are a constant source of trouble for banks in Africa, which have resorted to deploying strict gateway security controls.</p> <p>This has forced the threat actors to craft more clever attacks that could bypass the protection measures, and in 2022, bank-targeting campaigns are seen using a combination of tricks.</p> <p>One of those 2022 campaigns was discovered by HP Wolf Security, whose analysts looked into the adversary's tactics and the infection steps they follow.</p> <p>The lure</p> <p>The attack begins with a phishing email sent to a bank employee from a typo-squatted domain that resembles the URL of a legitimate company, typically a competitor bank.</p> <p>The email presents the recipient with a lucrative job offer and links to the details on the said site. Following that link takes the victim to a webpage containing application instructions.</p> <p>The content of this page is copied from an actual listing by the mimicked bank, so the details there appear convincingly realistic.</p> <p>These sites don't perform phishing or host malware, so their sole purpose is to lead the victim down the infection path.</p> <p>The payload</p> <p>The payload arrives in the form of an HTML attachment on the said email message, which is a base64-encoded ISO archive file decoded on the fly and offered for download via a JavaScript blob on the browser.</p> <p>This technique of sneaking risky file formats without raising alarms from email security products is called HTML smuggling, and it's a well-established and trending payload distribution method.</p> <p>The ISO file contains a Visual Basic Script (VBS) file, which executes upon double click to create a new Registry key and run PowerShell commands that call various Windows API functions.</p> <p>After a series of malicious code executions and Windows API abuse, GuLoader is assembled on the system and executed to download and runs the RemcosRAT malware.</p> <p>According to HP's threat analysts, GuLoader has two download URLs in its configuration, one pointing to Dropbox and one to OneDrive, so there's some redundancy implemented at this stage.</p> <p>It is also important to note that GuLoader is executed via PowerShell stored in the registry, and runs on the system memory, so most anti-virus tools won't detect it.</p> <p>As HP points out, the only way to break the infection chain would be to set the default application for script files from Windows Script Host to Notepad, which would reveal the real nature of the VBS file.</p> <p>The goal</p> <p>Remcos is an otherwise legitimate commercial remote access tool (RAT) that has been used by cybercriminals for malicious purposes for several years now.</p> <p>It's a powerful tool supporting remote command execution, screenshot capturing, keystroke logging, webcam and microphone recording, and more.</p>

	<p>Potentially, the threat actors use Remcos to sniff on transaction details, steal valuable credentials, move laterally in the bank's network, or steal information needed for BEC attacks.</p> <p>Financial extortion via data exfiltration or ransomware deployment is also likely, while the threat actors can always opt to sell their network access to other hackers and make a quick buck without risking law enforcement trouble.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 OldGremlin deploys new malware in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/oldgremlin-ransomware-deploys-new-malware-on-russian-mining-org/
GIST	<p>OldGremlin, a little-known threat actor that uses its particularly advanced skills to run carefully prepared, sporadic campaigns, has made a comeback last month after a gap of more than one year.</p> <p>The group distinguishes itself from other ransomware operations through the small number of campaigns - less than five since early 2021 - that target only businesses in Russia and the use of custom backdoors built in-house.</p> <p>Despite being less active, which may suggest that the ransomware business is closer to moonlighting, OldGremlin has demanded ransoms as high as \$3 million from one of its victims.</p> <p>Carefully prepared phishing</p> <p>The most recent OldGremlin activity consists of two phishing campaigns launched towards the end of March 2022. It is too early to assess how many companies were targeted but security researchers say that at least one Russian company in the mining sector is on the victim list.</p> <p>The adversary did not steer away from its previously observed tactic to obtain initial access and took advantage of trending news topics.</p> <p>Security researchers at Singapore-based cybersecurity company Group-IB say that this time OldGremlin impersonated a senior accountant at a Russian financial organization warning that the recent sanctions imposed on Russia would suspend the operations of the Visa and Mastercard payment processing systems.</p> <p><i>Hello,</i> <i>We, at [masked], have received reliable information about new sanctions in the next couple of days. The Visa/Mastercard payment system will be shut down completely. All cards issued in our country will no longer work.</i></p> <p><i>Everyone must therefore urgently issue [masked] cards and link them to their bank payroll. Use the following instructions [hyperlink] for the following banks: [masked]</i></p> <p><i>Fill out the form (see attachment) and send it back, making sure to specify the bank branch at which it is convenient for you to pick up the bank card.</i></p> <p><i>Remember that if you want to link a card to a payroll, you must inform the accounting department of the account details after receiving the card.</i> <i>Please sign and send the form to our email address within 5 (five) hours from the moment you receive this email. For the purposes of efficiency, please send it in this email thread chain.</i></p> <p><i>[masked],</i> <i>Senior Accountant at [masked]</i></p> <p>New custom backdoor</p>

The email pointed the recipient to a malicious document stored in a Dropbox storage that downloads a backdoor called TinyFluff, which launches the Node.js interpreter and gives the attacker remote access to the target system.

TinyFluff is a new variant of an older backdoor, TinyNode, the gang used in [past attacks](#)....

Group-IB researchers discovered two variants of TinyFluff, an earlier one that is more complex and a newer, simplified version that copies the script and the Node.js interpreter from its storage location at 192.248.176[.]138.

“We believe that the first, more complex, version of TinyFluff was raw. That’s why the gang simplified the tool so they could use it on the fly. However, they will most likely improve it for further attacks” - Group-IB Threat Intelligence team

Both variants of the backdoor are currently detected by more than 20 antivirus engines on the Virus Total scanning platform.

In a report shared with BleepingComputer, Group-IB provides indicators of compromise and a [detailed technical analysis of the tools OldGremlin used](#) in the two phishing campaigns deployed last month.

After planting the backdoor, OldGremlin proceeds to the reconnaissance stage, checking if the application is running in a test environment.

The commands for this stage of the attack are delivered in clear text, allowing the researchers to examine them using a traffic sniffer

- collecting information about the infected system/device
- obtaining information about connected drives
- launching the cmd.exe shell, executing a command, and sending the output to the command and control server (C2)
- obtaining information about the plugins installed in the system
- getting information about files in the specific directories on the system drive
- terminating the Node.js interpreter

OldGremlin can spend months inside the compromised network before deploying the final stage of the attack: delivering TinyCrypt/TinyCryptor, the group’s custom ransomware payload.

Just like with ransomware attacks from other gangs, the victim gets a ransom note that provides a contact to reach the threat actor for payment negotiations.

Group-IB told BleepingComputer that OldGremlin encrypted at least three companies since the researchers started tracking the gang in 2020.

Although this number is insignificant in comparison with attacks from other ransomware gangs, the researchers note that OldGremlin spends all year reaping the benefits of the few campaigns they launch.

In 2021, the gang deployed only one phishing campaign but it was enough to keep them busy the entire year as it provided initial access to the network of multiple businesses.

Group-IB says that it’s just a matter of time for a larger number of OldGremlin’s victims, apart from the targeted Russian mining company, to be uncovered this year as a result of the group’s March phishing activity.

Based on the evidence they found and after analyzing the quality of the phishing emails and the decoy documents, the researchers assess that OldGremlin has Russian-speaking members.

They described the knowledge the group has of the Russian landscape as “astonishing.”

	<p>By focusing only on Russian companies (banks, industrial enterprises, medical organizations, and software developers), OldGremlin breaks the unspoken rule of not attacking entities in the Russian territories.</p> <p>Group-IB's report on the recent OldGremlin campaigns, including technical analysis of the attacks and indicators of compromised is available on the company's website.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Operation to disrupt Zloader botnet
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/microsoft-leads-operation-to-disrupt-zloader-botnet-activity
GIST	<p>Researchers from Microsoft and several security vendors have sinkholed 65 domains associated with the prolific Zloader malware distribution botnet.</p> <p>Another 319 backup domains that Zloader generated via an embedded domain generation algorithm (DGA) have been seized as part of the same operation, which included ESET, Palo Alto Networks, and Black Lotus Labs.</p> <p>The goal is to disable the infrastructure that the criminal gang behind the Zloader botnet has been using as part of its malware-distribution-as-a-service operation, says Amy Hogan-Burney, general manager of Microsoft's digital crimes unit. It is likely the operators of the botnet will try to revive operations, Hogan-Burney says, so Microsoft and the other entities involved in the takedown will continue to work with each other and with Internet service providers to monitor for and identify any further activity by the group.</p> <p>Zloader first surfaced on security vendor radars in November 2019 as banking malware modeled along the lines of the notorious Zeus banking Trojan. The malware — which was sold in underground forums under the name "Silent Night" — was designed to steal data associated with online bank accounts, such as account login IDs and passwords.</p> <p>ESET said its researchers have observed criminal groups using different ways to distribute Zloader, including via exploit kits such as RIG, COVID-19 themed phishing emails, adult sites, and misuse of Google Ads. The malware is designed to take a variety of malicious actions once installed on a system. This includes stealing data from browsers, stealing cryptocurrency wallets, logging keystrokes, enabling remote control, and supporting arbitrary command execution, ESET said.</p> <p>One feature of the malware — its ability to profile the network and the compromised host — has allowed threat actors to distribute different malicious payloads to infected systems. Recently, this has included various ransomware families such as DarkSide and Ryuk, both of which have been associated with numerous high-profile attacks over the past two years or so.</p> <p>Microsoft's digital crimes unit led the effort to take down Zloader infrastructure. The company obtained a court order from the US District Court for the Northern District of Georgia that allowed Microsoft's security researchers to take control of 65 Zloader-associated domains and direct traffic to these sites to a Microsoft sinkhole.</p> <p>Disruption operations such as this require a lot of coordination, information sharing, and validation between partners, says Alexis Dorais-Joncas, security intelligence team lead at ESET. "Technical challenges aside, joining a group to cooperate on a disruption operation involves a significant amount of trust," he says.</p> <p>To succeed, the companies partnering with each other in such efforts need to be willing to share information freely with other. "We have to know we can trust every single partner to do the right thing and not misuse any information along the way to their own benefit," Dorais-Joncas says.</p> <p>On the operational side, the challenge with platforms like Zloader is that they allow affiliates to create their own independent botnet. So, disrupting it means being able to map all active botnets associated with</p>

the malware, identify the infrastructure behind each one of these botnets, and simultaneously monitor for the appearance of new botnets.

To do this, ESET used its endpoint security technology to automatically cluster new Zloader samples and extract command and control information from them to enable a real-time view of all active Zloader botnets and associated network infrastructure.

ESET's data was merged with data from the other vendors involved in the Zloader takedown operation so that the group was able to compile a comprehensive list of all the malicious domains and IP addresses used to control Zloader-based botnets, Dorais-Joncas says. "We are lucky to have a great relationship with Microsoft's Digital Crimes Unit and the other partners involved in this effort," he says. "[We] will continue to collaborate as needed to defend against an expanding threat landscape."

How Impactful Are Such Takedowns?

The Zloader botnet operation is one of many in recent years where security vendors have successfully partnered with each other to take down a particularly dangerous threat operation. In many cases, the takedowns had an immediate impact on the targeted activity but have failed to stop it completely — [Trickbot is one especially noteworthy example](#).

Davis McCarthy, principal security researcher at Valtix, says one problem is that some threat operators create multiple versions of a botnet to improve its resilience against takedown.

The Zloader takedown, for instance, involved three separate botnets, each of which had been set up using a different version of the malware. Technologies such as DGA has also allowed threat actors to develop malware capable of automatically generating numerous backup domains in case their primary domains become unavailable. Zloader's DGA allowed the malware to generate 32 new domains per day per botnet.

"Takedown operations require the coordination of multiple stakeholders — compounded by varying laws and relationships. This coordination can be slow," McCarthy says.

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HEADLINE	04/13 SMS group spam promises free gifts
SOURCE	https://blog.malwarebytes.com/scams/2022/04/sms-group-spam-promises-free-gifts-in-return-for-bill-payment/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>We're seeing lots of examples of peculiar SMS messages sent to random groups of people. Most of these messages promise free gifts and/or offers after having paid bills. Nobody has asked for these texts, and they're not being sent by providers of any services. What's going on?</p> <p>The set up Most of the messages we've seen, and indeed received ourselves, are identical to the below example: <i>Free Msg: your bill is paid for March. Thanks, here's a little gift for you [URL removed]</i> <i>Spam messaging</i></p> <p>Where do the links go? A very good question. Clicking any of the links while on desktop typically results in a site failing to load error. Most likely, they're checking the user agent of your browser to ensure you're on mobile when hitting the link.</p> <p>On mobile, you're bounced through a secondary URL before landing on a 404 error on Facebook or Twitter. Despite a piece of this website daisy-chain being lost to the void, the texts are still coming and it's probably child's play to correct the broken landing pages to something functional. As a result, we can't say for sure what the final destination is.</p> <p>A friend of mine mentioned they ended up on some sort of airpod/free mobile accessories offer site from a similar group message not so long ago, so that's one possibility. What we can say is that you should</p>

	definitely avoid clicking these links should you receive one. We simply don't know where you'll end up, and you can very easily end up out of pocket with one mis-click.
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HEADLINE	04/13 Feds reveal 'Swiss army knife' for hacking
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/pipedream-ics-malware/
GIST	<p>MALWARE DESIGNED TO target industrial control systems like power grids, factories, water utilities, and oil refineries represents a rare species of digital badness. So when the United States government warns of a piece of code built to target not just one of those industries, but potentially all of them, critical infrastructure owners worldwide should take notice.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Department of Energy, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the NSA, and the FBI jointly released an advisory about a new hacker toolset potentially capable of meddling with a wide range of industrial control system equipment. More than any previous industrial control system hacking toolkit, the malware contains an array of components designed to disrupt or take control of the functioning of devices, including programmable logic controllers (PLCs) that are sold by Schneider Electric and OMRON and are designed to serve as the interface between traditional computers and the actuators and sensors in industrial environments. Another component of the malware is designed to target Open Platform Communications Unified Architecture (OPC UA) servers—the computers that communicate with those controllers.</p> <p>"This is the most expansive industrial control system attack tool that anyone has ever documented," says Sergio Caltagirone, the vice president of threat intelligence at industrial-focused cybersecurity firm Dragos, which contributed research to the advisory and published its own report about the malware. Researchers at Mandiant, Palo Alto Networks, Microsoft, and Schneider Electric also contributed to the advisory. "It's like a Swiss Army knife with a huge number of pieces to it."</p> <p>Dragos says the malware has the ability to hijack target devices, disrupt or prevent operators from accessing them, permanently brick them, or even use them as a foothold to give hackers access to other parts of an industrial control system network. He notes that while the toolkit, which Dragos calls "Pipedream," appears to specifically target Schneider Electric and OMRON PLCs, it does so by exploiting underlying software in those PLCs known as Codesys, which is used far more broadly across hundreds of other types of PLCs. This means that the malware could easily be adapted to work in almost any industrial environment. "This toolset is so big that it's basically a free-for-all," Caltagirone says. "There's enough in here for everyone to worry about."</p> <p>The CISA advisory refers to an unnamed "APT actor" that developed the malware toolkit, using the common acronym APT to mean advanced persistent threat, a term for state-sponsored hacker groups. It's far from clear where the government agencies found the malware, or which country's hackers created it—though the timing of the advisory follows warnings from the Biden administration about the Russian government making preparatory moves to carry out disruptive cyberattacks in the midst of its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Dragos also declined to comment on the malware's origin. But Caltagirone says it doesn't appear to have been actually used against a victim—or at least, it hasn't yet triggered actual physical effects on a victim's industrial control systems. "We have high confidence it hasn't been deployed yet for disruptive or destructive effects," says Caltagirone.</p> <p>While the toolkit's adaptability means it could be used against practically any industrial environment, from manufacturing to water treatment, Dragos points out that the apparent focus on Schneider Electric and OMRON PLCs does suggest that the hackers may have built it with power grid and oil refineries—particularly liquified natural gas facilities—in mind, given Schneider's wide use in electric utilities and OMRON's broad adoption in the oil and gas sector. Caltagirone suggests the ability to send commands to servo motors in those petrochemical facilities via OMRON PLCs would be particularly dangerous, with the ability to cause "destruction or even loss of life."</p>

The CISA advisory doesn't point to any particular vulnerabilities in the devices or software the Pipedream malware targets, though Caltagirone says it does exploit multiple zero-day vulnerabilities—previously unpatched hackable software flaws—that are still being fixed. He notes, however, that even patching those vulnerabilities won't prevent most of Pipedream's capabilities, as it's largely designed to hijack the intended functionality of target devices and send legitimate commands in the protocols they use. The CISA advisory includes a [list of measures](#) that infrastructure operators should take to protect their operations, from limiting industrial control systems' network connections to implementing monitoring systems for ICS systems, in particular, that send alerts for suspicious behavior.

When WIRED reached out to Schneider Electric and OMRON, a Schneider spokesperson responded in a statement that the company has closely collaborated with the US government and security firm Mandiant and that they together “identified and developed protective measures to defend against” the newly revealed attack toolkit. “This is an instance of successful collaboration to deter threats on critical infrastructure before they occur and further underscores how public-private partnerships are instrumental to proactively detect and counter threats before they can be deployed,” the company added. OMRON didn't immediately respond to WIRED's request for comment.

The discovery of the Pipedream malware toolkit represents a rare addition to the handful of malware specimens found in the wild that target industrial control systems (ICS) software. The first and still most notorious example of that sort of malware remains Stuxnet, the US- and Israeli-created code that was uncovered in 2010 after it was [used to destroy nuclear enrichment centrifuges in Iran](#). More recently, the Russian hackers known as Sandworm, part of the Kremlin's GRU military intelligence agency, deployed a tool called Industroyer or Crash Override to [trigger a blackout in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv in late 2016](#).

The next year, Kremlin-linked hackers infected systems at the Saudi Arabian oil refinery Petro Rabigh with a piece of malware known as Triton or Trisis, which was designed to target its safety systems—with potentially catastrophic physical consequences—but instead [triggered two shutdowns of the plant's operations](#). Then, just last week, Russia's Sandworm hackers were detected using a new variant of their Industroyer code to target a regional electrical utility in Ukraine, though Ukrainian officials say they [managed to detect the attack and avert a blackout](#).

The Pipedream advisory serves as a particularly troubling new entry in the rogue's gallery of ICS malware, however, given the breadth of its functionality. But its revelation—apparently before it could be used for disruptive effects—comes in the midst of a [larger crackdown by the Biden administration](#) on potential hacking threats to critical infrastructure systems, particularly from Russia. Last month, for instance, the Justice Department [unsealed indictments](#) against two Russian hacker groups with a history of targeting power grids and petrochemical systems.

One indictment named for the first time one of the hackers allegedly responsible for the Triton malware attack in Saudi Arabia and also accused him and his coconspirators of targeting US refineries. A second indictment named three agents of Russia's FSB intelligence agency as members of a notorious hacker group known as Berserk Bear, responsible for years of electric utility hacking. And then early this month the FBI took measures to [disrupt a botnet of networking devices controlled by Sandworm](#), still the only hackers in history known to have triggered blackouts.

Even as the government has taken measures to call out and even disarm those disruptive hackers, Pipedream represents a powerful malware toolkit in unknown hands—and one from which infrastructure operators need to take measures to protect themselves, says Caltagirone. “This is not a small deal,” he says. “It’s a clear and present danger to the safety of industrial control systems.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 Russia leaking data like a sieve
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/russia-ukraine-data/

NAMES, BIRTHDAYS, PASSPORT numbers, job titles—the personal information goes on for pages and looks like any typical data breach. But this data set is very different. It allegedly contains the personal information of 1,600 Russian troops who served in Bucha, a Ukrainian city devastated during Russia's war and the scene of [multiple potential war crimes](#).

The data set is not the only one. Another allegedly contains the names and contact details of 620 Russian spies who are registered to work at the Moscow office of the FSB, the country's main security agency. Neither set of information was published by hackers. Instead they were put online by Ukraine's intelligence services, with all the names and details freely available to anyone online. "Every European should know their names," Ukrainian officials wrote in a Facebook post as they published the data.

Since Russian troops crossed Ukraine's borders at the end of February, colossal amounts of information about the Russian state and its activities have been made public. The data offers unparalleled glimpses into closed-off private institutions, and it may be a gold mine for investigators, from journalists to those tasked with investigating war crimes.

Broadly, the data comes in two flavors: information published proactively by Ukrainian authorities or their allies, and information obtained by hacktivists. Hundreds of gigabytes of files and millions of emails have been made public.

"Both sides in this conflict are very good at information operations," says Philip Ingram, a former colonel in British military intelligence. "The Russians are quite blatant about the lies that they'll tell," he adds. Since the war started, Russian disinformation [has been consistently debunked](#). Ingram says Ukraine has to be more tactical with the information it publishes. "They have to make sure that what they're putting out is credible and they're not caught out telling lies in a way that would embarrass them or embarrass their international partners."

Both the lists of alleged FSB officers and Russian troops were published online by Ukraine's Central Intelligence Agency at the end of March and start of April, respectively. While WIRED has not been able to verify the accuracy of the data—and Ukrainian cybersecurity officials did not respond to a request for comment—Aric Toler, from investigative outlet Bellingcat, [tweeted](#) that the FSB details appear to have been combined from previous leaks and open source information. It is unclear how up-to-date the information is.

Regardless, it appears to be one of the first times a government has [doxed](#) thousands of military personnel in one fell swoop. Jack McDonald, a senior lecturer in war studies at King's College London who has [researched privacy in war](#), says that, throughout history, nations have kept lists of their opponents or tried to create them. But these have often been linked to counterinsurgency efforts and were typically not made public. "Openly publishing such lists of your opponent, particularly at the scale that digital operations appear to allow, that seems very new," McDonald says.

While [doxing is, generally speaking, one of the most toxic online behaviors](#) and can ruin lives, the stakes are different in war, when the [gloves are essentially off](#). McDonald says that publishing peoples' names and personal details during wartime is a "murky area" ethically, but that there may be justification for it when linked to a military institution or war crimes. Violating people's privacy is "very low down the list" of how someone may be harmed during conflict, McDonald says. He adds that verifying who is on a list and excluding the possibility that it contains incorrect information is important to not causing additional harm. Demonstrating the complexity of the issue, Google blocked access to a PDF of Ukraine's alleged lists of Russian troops in Bucha because the file violated its policies against the publication of people's private information. Asked about the decision to block the document, Google declined to comment further.

"When you think about what comes after the war, these lists might be a big feature of it," McDonald says. The lists—if the information they contain is accurate—may provide a starting point for investigators looking into potential war crimes in Ukraine. For instance, a name could be linked to a photo, which is linked to a social media account, or footage that places someone in a particular location or event. Each piece of information could act as a tiny piece in a much larger puzzle. Researchers are already racing

to [save and archive thousands of TikToks, Telegram messages, and social media posts](#) in formats that can be used as evidence. (Although it is [unlikely that Russia would extradite](#) anyone accused of crimes to face trials.)

More immediately, the lists may be useful in other ways. “It shows the Russians that they’ve got access to it,” Ingram says. For people in Ukraine, he says, the publication of the data indicates that Ukraine’s intelligence authorities are monitoring threats against them. And internationally, the information could be useful to intelligence agencies, such as the US Central Intelligence Agency or the UK’s MI6. “They don’t have everything,” Ingram says. “It’s always good to get information from a different source—even if you think you have it already—because what it does is it corroborates the sources that you’ve got.”

Ukraine’s use of information warfare has been lauded since Russia invaded—from [President Volodymyr Zelensky’s videos](#) to the [“Ghost of Kyiv”](#)—but it has not been the only nation actively publishing information about the war. US and UK intelligence officials have regularly been trying to disrupt Vladimir Putin’s efforts by taking the unusual approach of declassifying information—from [revealing potential false flag operations](#) to publishing stats on [Russian military losses](#). “The purpose of that activity is to highlight the costs to the Russian population at home and to impose costs on individual actors,” says Jessica Brandt, a fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology. “But doxing, in general, makes me uncomfortable.”

And information published by global intelligence services is only the beginning. Since the war started, [Ukraine has mobilized a volunteer IT Army](#) that has targeted Russian websites and companies, aiming to take their services offline. Ukraine’s digital ministry has also become a [polished war machine](#). Hactivists have also [been busy](#). In the early days of the conflict, the hacker collective Anonymous declared it was in a “cyber war” against the Russian government, and it has claimed credit for attacks that have knocked sites offline and defaced others—despite the [potential for unintended consequences](#). This activity has led to the publication of huge volumes of information about Russian-linked businesses and government bodies.

Transparency activists at the group [Distributed Denial of Secrets, or DDoSecrets](#), have published more than a dozen data sets linked to Russia since Putin’s troops invaded Ukraine in late February. “Putin put a target on the back of Russian interests, and they’re getting hit all at once,” DDoSecrets cofounder Emma Best wrote in a [statement posted to Twitter](#). DDoSecrets secrets has published more than 700 gigabytes of data from the Russian government and more than 3 million Russian emails and documents, Best [says](#).

DDoSecrets also claims to have published more than 360,000 files from Roskomnadzor, the Russian media regulator; 62,000 emails from an investment firm owned by a sanctioned Russian individual; 900,000 emails from VGTRK, a state-owned broadcaster; 230,000 emails from the Russian Ministry of Culture; and 250,000 emails from the Ministry of Education. The list goes on. Best’s statement says DDoSecrets is concerned with improving transparency “where it’s lacking and to publish datasets in the public interest, regardless of its point of origin.”

‘Hack and leak’ operations are not uncommon—think of [North Korea’s hack against Sony](#), or any [number of ransomware extortions](#)—but Russia has not often been a target of such operations. The Russian government has largely given cybercriminals based in the country a free pass as long as they don’t target companies within its borders. Brandt says some of the information published has parallels to Russia’s own hacking and leaking of “weaponized information,” [citing the 2016 DNC hack](#) as an example.

Over time, the published files could prove to be a gold mine for researchers wanting to understand how the Russian state operates, including its approach to censorship and media control. They may also provide a blueprint for future information operations in other countries, or other wars. For now, though, they’ve exposed Russia to an unprecedented degree. “Frankly,” Best wrote, “we’ve never seen this much data out of Russia before”

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/lynnwood-mom-shot-with-pellet-gun-social-media-prank/281-c433ef92-6124-49e7-b87c-857f86760603
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash — A Lynnwood woman believes she was the target of a social media stunt at a public park that could have resulted in a serious injury.</p> <p>Thien Truong was at Picnic Point Park when she said she was shot in the head with a pellet gun.</p> <p>Truong has come to the park almost every day for the past year to walk her dogs and play with her kids. She never had a problem, until Tuesday.</p> <p>"I didn't suspect anything," she said, "but now I believe when the boys came to this park they were on a mission."</p> <p>Truong said she encountered a group of three high school-aged boys as she walked back from the beach. Soon after they passed each other she said the group turned around and went back to their car.</p> <p>As Truong was walking up the side of the road toward her home they approached.</p> <p>"It all happened so fast," she said. "Something hit me near my eye. They just laughed really loud and drove off."</p> <p>Truong believes she was shot with some sort of pellet gun. The projectile hit her in the temple just an inch from her eye.</p> <p>"I almost had a severe injury to my eyes for no reason," said the mother of two. "How could these kids be so cruel?"</p> <p>Truong fears the incident is part of a viral social media challenge where teenagers do drive-by shootings with airsoft or pellet guns, targeting unsuspecting people.</p> <p>Police departments across the country have issued warnings to the public and parents to be on the lookout for this sort of dangerous prank and to tell their kids not to do it. However, reports of the prank are still popping up across the country.</p> <p>"I feel like this is going viral and it's out of control," Truong said. "It's happening every few days."</p> <p>The prank was popularized on TikTok. A spokesperson told KING 5, "This behavior does not appear to be native to TikTok, and this isn't content that is popular/prevalent on the app."</p> <p>She added, "To help keep TikTok safe and welcoming, we employ various methods to help prevent potentially harmful content from flourishing on the platform, including removing content that violates our Community Guidelines, making some content ineligible for recommendation, and limiting search suggestions."</p> <p>The spokesperson pointed out TikTok has partnered with "top creators" to make short videos that encourage our community to Stop, Think, Decide, and Act.</p> <p>Regardless, Truong wants those responsible for the attack held accountable.</p> <p>"This has to stop," she said. "I don't think I'll be the last victim, unfortunately."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Alert: industrial control system malware
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/us-agencies-industrial-control-system-malware-discovered/

BOSTON (AP) — Multiple U.S. government agencies issued a joint alert Wednesday warning of the discovery of a suite of malicious cyber tools created by unnamed advanced threat actors that are capable of sabotaging the energy sector and other critical industries.

The public alert from the Energy and Homeland Security Departments, the FBI and National Security Agency did not name the actors or offer details on the find. But their private sector cybersecurity partners said the evidence suggests Russia is behind the industrial control system-disrupting tools — and that they were configured to initially target North American energy concerns.

One of the cybersecurity firms involved, Mandiant, called the tools “exceptionally rare and dangerous.”

In a report, it called the tools’ functionality was “consistent with the malware used in Russia’s prior physical attacks” though it acknowledged that the evidence linking it to Moscow is “largely circumstantial.”

The CEO of another government partner, Robert M. Lee of Dragos, agreed that a state actor almost certainly crafted the malware, which he said was configured to initially target liquified natural gas and electric power sites in North America.

Lee referred questions on the state actor’s identity to the U.S. government and would not explain how the malware was discovered other than to say it was caught “before an attack was attempted.”

“We’re actually one step ahead of the adversary. None of us want them to understand where they screwed up,” said Lee. “Big win.”

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which published the alert, declined to identify the threat actor.

The U.S. government has warned critical infrastructure industries the gird for possible cyberattacks from Russia as retaliation for severe economic sanctions imposed on Moscow in response to its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

Officials have said that Russian hacker interest in the U.S. energy sector is particularly high, and CISA urged it in a statement Wednesday to be especially mindful of the mitigation measures recommended in the alert. Last month, the FBI issued an alert saying Russian hackers have scanned at least five unnamed energy companies for vulnerabilities.

Lee said the malware was “designed to be a framework to go after lots of different types of industries and be leveraged multiple times. Based on the configuration of it, the initial targets would be LNG and electric in North America.”

Mandiant said the tools pose the greatest threat to Ukraine, NATO members and other states assisting Kyiv in its defense against Russian military aggression.

It said the malware could be used to shut down critical machinery, sabotage industrial processes and disable safety controllers, leading to the physical destruction of machinery that could lead to the loss of human lives. It compared the tools to Triton, malware traced to a Russian government research institute that targeted critical safety systems and twice forced the emergency shutdown of a Saudi oil refinery in 2017 and to Industroyer, the malware that Russian military hackers used the previous year to trigger a power outage in Ukraine.

Lee said the newly discovered malware, dubbed Pipedream, is only the seventh such malicious software to be identified that is designed to attack industrial control systems.

Lee said Dragos, which specializes in industrial control system protection, identified and analyzed its capability in early 2022 as part of its normal business research and in collaboration with partners.

He would offer no more specifics. In addition to Dragos and Mandiant, the U.S. government alert offers thanks to Microsoft, Palo Alto Networks and Schneider Electric for their contributions.

Schneider Electric is one of the manufacturers listed in the alert whose equipment is targeted by the malware. Omron is another.

Mandiant said it had analyzed the tools in early 2002 with Schneider Electric.

In a statement, Palo Alto Networks executive Wendi Whitmore said: ““We’ve been warning for years that our critical infrastructure is constantly under attack. Today’s alerts detail just how sophisticated our adversaries have gotten.”

Microsoft had no comment.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/13 Brooklyn subway attacker charged w/terror
SOURCE	https://lasvegassun.com/news/2022/apr/13/man-arrested-in-brooklyn-subway-attack-charged-wit/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — The man accused of shooting 10 people on a Brooklyn subway train was arrested Wednesday and charged with a federal terrorism offense after a daylong manhunt and a tipster’s call led police to him on a Manhattan street.</p> <p>Frank R. James, 62, was taken into custody about 30 hours after the carnage on a rush-hour train, which left five victims in critical condition and people around the city on edge.</p> <p>“My fellow New Yorkers, we got him,” Mayor Eric Adams said.</p> <p>James was awaiting arraignment on a charge that pertains to terrorist or other violent attacks against mass transit systems and carries a sentence of up to life in prison, Brooklyn U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said.</p> <p>In recent months, James railed in online videos about racism and violence in the U.S. and about his experiences with mental health care in New York City, and he had criticized Adams’ policies on mental health and subway safety. But the motive for the subway attack remains unclear, and there is no indication that James had ties to terror organizations, international or otherwise, Peace said.</p> <p>It wasn’t immediately clear whether James, who is from New York but has lived recently in Philadelphia and Milwaukee, has an attorney or anyone else who can speak for him. A sign taped to the door of James’ Milwaukee apartment asks that all mail be delivered to a post office box.</p> <p>James, in a blue t-shirt and brown pants with his hands cuffed behind his back, didn’t respond to reporters shouting questions as he was walked from a police station to an unmarked police car a few hours after his arrest.</p> <p>As terrified riders fled the attack, James apparently hopped another train — the same one many were steered to for safety, police said. He got out at the next station, disappearing into the nation’s most populous city. Police launched a massive effort to find him, releasing his name and issuing cellphone alerts.</p> <p>They got a tip Wednesday that he was in a McDonald’s in Manhattan’s East Village neighborhood, Chief of Department Kenneth Corey said. James was gone when officers arrived, but they soon spotted him on a busy corner nearby.</p>

Four police cars zoomed around a corner, officers leaped out and, soon, a compliant James was in handcuffs as a crowd of people looked on, witness Aleksei Korobow said.

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said authorities “were able to shrink his world quickly.”

“There was nowhere left for him to run,” she said.

The day before, James set off smoke grenades in a commuter-packed subway car and then fired at least 33 shots with a 9 mm handgun, police said.

Police Chief of Detectives James Essig said police were told that after James opened one of the smoke grenades, a rider asked, “What did you do?”

“Oops,” James said, then went on to brandish his gun and open fire, according to a witness account.

At least a dozen people who escaped gunshot wounds were treated for smoke inhalation and other injuries.

The shooter left behind numerous clues, including the gun, ammunition magazines, a hatchet, smoke grenades, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van. That key led investigators to James.

Federal investigators determined the gun used in the shooting was purchased by James at a pawn shop — a licensed firearms dealer — in the Columbus, Ohio, area in 2011.

The van was found, unoccupied, near a station where investigators determined the gunman had entered the subway system. No explosives or firearms were found in the van, a law enforcement official who wasn't authorized to comment on the investigation and did so on the condition of anonymity told The Associated Press. Police did find other items, including pillows, suggesting he may have been sleeping or planned to sleep in the van, the official said.

Investigators believe James drove up from Philadelphia on Monday and have reviewed surveillance video showing a man matching his physical description coming out of the van early Tuesday morning, the official said. Other video shows James entering a subway station in Brooklyn with a large bag, the official said.

In addition to analyzing financial and telephone records connected to James, investigators were reviewing hours of rambling, profanity-filled videos James posted on YouTube and other social media platforms as they tried to discern a motive.

In one video, posted a day before the attack, James, who is Black, criticizes crime against Black people and says drastic action is needed.

“You got kids going in here now taking machine guns and mowing down innocent people,” James says. “It’s not going to get better until we make it better,” he said, adding that he thought things would only change if certain people were “stomped, kicked and tortured” out of their “comfort zone.”

In another video he says, “this nation was born in violence, it’s kept alive by violence or the threat thereof and it’s going to die a violent death. There’s nothing going to stop that.”

His posts are replete with violent language and bigoted comments, some against Black people.

Sewell called the posts “concerning” and officials tightened security for Adams, who was already isolating following a positive COVID-19 test Sunday.

Several of James' videos mention New York's subways. A Feb. 20 video says the mayor and governor’s plan to address homelessness and safety in the subway system “is doomed for failure” and refers to

	<p>himself as a “victim” of the city's mental health programs. A Jan. 25 video criticizes Adams’ plan to end gun violence.</p> <p>The Brooklyn subway station where passengers fled the smoke-filled train in the attack was open as usual Wednesday morning, less than 24 hours after the violence.</p> <p>Commuter Jude Jacques, who takes the D train to his job as a fire safety director some two blocks from the shooting scene, said he prays every morning but had a special request on Wednesday.</p> <p>“I said, ‘God, everything is in your hands,’” Jacques said. “I was antsy, and you can imagine why. Everybody is scared because it just happened.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 TSA: low-risk terror attack on mass transit
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-tsa-report-saw-low-risk-of-a-terrorist-attack-on-mass-transit-2-weeks-before-new-york-subway-shooting-000716551.html
GIST	<p>Frank James was charged Wednesday with carrying out a terrorist attack on mass transit, federal prosecutors in New York announced, after allegedly opening fire Tuesday morning on a subway train, wounding 10 people and leaving an additional 13 injured in the melee that followed.</p> <p>The attack, Yahoo News has learned, came two weeks after the Transportation Security Administration issued an annual mass transit threat assessment that concluded the threat to mass transit and rail systems for 2022 was “low,” which TSA defines as “adversaries very likely have only minimal intent to attack the target OR if they do are almost certainly incapable of attacking it.”</p> <p>Yahoo News reviewed a copy of the 23-page report assessment that was sent to police departments and mass transportation systems across the country, including the NYPD and the Metropolitan Transit Authority, which operates the New York subway system. The TSA is charged with overseeing security of the nation’s rail systems like Amtrak, which feeds into the subway system. This report was marked “Sensitive Security Information” and was not made public.</p> <p>“Our assessment of threat actor intent and capability has not changed over the past year,” the assessment, dated March 28, reads. “We anticipate the MTPR [mass transit and passenger rail] threat level will remain low throughout 2022.”</p> <p>But the report also acknowledged that the nation’s rail and mass transit systems remain vulnerable to terrorist attacks such as the one James is accused of carrying out on Tuesday.</p> <p>“We judge that terrorists almost certainly maintain the capability to conduct attacks against MTPR in the Homeland using unsophisticated tactics, including armed assault, arson, rudimentary IEDs [improvised explosive devices], and sabotage,” the assessment states. “Terrorists operating abroad successfully used unsophisticated attack tactics against MTPR systems in 2021, and the material needed to conduct these types of attack are almost certainly accessible to domestic-based threat actors.”</p> <p>The March 28, 2022, assessment also noted that the TSA’s “ability to capture all extremist messaging is limited by terrorists’ increasing use of encrypted platforms and closed chatrooms.” But officials in New York have said the suspect posted public videos on a YouTube channel in which he talked about killing people and discussed a plan announced by Adams and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul to protect people on the city’s subway system.</p> <p>In a video posted on March 18, James said he was ready to carry out an unspecified plan.</p> <p>“Since [expletive] are trying to get me locked up, why don’t I just plan to get myself locked up? But I planned and I prepared and I’ll be ready for it,” he said in the video. “I’ll do what I have to do and just resign myself to the fact, no regrets, I had nothing to lose and let that be it.”</p>

The NYPD did not immediately respond to Yahoo News' questions about the impact of this threat assessment on police security posture in the New York City subway system or if more police would have been deployed to the subway if the TSA's threat assessment had determined there was a medium or high level of threat.

The report was produced by the TSA and in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security's Counterterrorism Mission Center, the FBI and the Department of Transportation.

The DHS, the TSA and the Department of Transportation did not immediately return Yahoo News' request for comment.

James was in the FBI's Guardian lead system, which tracks people deemed to be potential threats. FBI agents also interviewed him several times prior to Tuesday's attack. The FBI did not respond to Yahoo News' questions about those interviews or about its involvement with the TSA threat assessment.

In an email to Yahoo News, the MTA said it was working with police and local officials on the investigation into Tuesday's shooting.

"With the support of Governor Hochul, Mayor Adams has made a powerful commitment to subway safety and has already taken significant steps to increase the presence and visibility of NYPD officers in the transit system — especially on platforms and trains, where riders want to see them most. We look forward to continuing to strengthen this partnership as we restore riders' confidence in the transit system."

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HEADLINE	04/13 China embrace of Taliban undermines US
SOURCE	https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/chinas-embrace-of-the-taliban-complicates-us-afghanistan-strategy/
GIST	<p>"China is our most important partner and represents a fundamental and extraordinary opportunity for us," Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in September 2021, shortly after the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan. Late last month, China reciprocated this enthusiasm by hosting members of the Taliban in addition to the foreign ministers from Afghanistan's neighbors to discuss the Taliban-led country's economic development and security. Beijing's courtship of the Taliban only adds to instability in the region, challenging the U.S. and its allies to find new ways to deal with the combined threat.</p> <p>A week prior to the foreign ministers' meeting, China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, stopped by Kabul for discussions with acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. Conversations reportedly focused on improving Afghanistan's mining sector as well as Afghanistan's role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Wang is the most senior Chinese official to visit since the Taliban seized control of the country. His arrival in Kabul came one day after the Taliban faced robust international criticism for reversing its earlier pledge to allow secondary schooling for girls.</p> <p>China's burgeoning relationship with the Taliban should come as no surprise, as improving ties has been a public goal of Beijing even prior to the U.S. withdrawal. In August 2021, after the fall of Kabul, China issued a statement saying it "respects the right of the Afghan people to independently determine their own destiny" and will develop "friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan." Although China hasn't yet formally recognized the Taliban, China's rhetoric and continuing engagement suggest official recognition may not be far off.</p> <p>Beijing is pursuing two main objectives through its outreach to the Taliban. The first is assurance from the Taliban that they will mitigate threats posed by extremist groups that operate close to China's borders. In particular, Beijing wants the Taliban to stop the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which supports Uyghur separatism, from expanding and potentially carrying out attack targeting Chinese interests in the region.</p> <p>Second, Beijing wants to protect the investments it has already made in Afghanistan and plans to make through programs like the BRI. Proposals by Chinese companies to extract and develop Afghanistan's</p>

copper and oil deposits have been on [hold](#) for more than a decade due to political instability. With the United States gone, China hopes the Taliban can [stabilize](#) the country enough to resume these projects.

China's willingness to partner with the Taliban undermines American efforts to influence the extremist group's behavior through pressure campaigns and sanctions. Beijing has directly lobbied on Kabul's behalf, demanding that Washington [return Afghanistan's frozen assets](#), a step that would only weaken U.S. leverage. At the aforementioned foreign ministers meeting, Chinese leader Xi Jinping's [statement](#) called for more aid for Afghanistan and made no mention of the Taliban's human rights record.

Although Washington cannot stop China from working with the group, the United States and likeminded partners can take steps to mitigate China's growing influence in Afghanistan.

Specifically, Washington should seek New Delhi's guidance in [leading](#) multilateral diplomacy, and developing political alternatives for Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan's institutions are weak and threatened by the Taliban, Washington should follow New Delhi's lead and support civil society organizations, businesses, and media alternatives to the Taliban both within Afghanistan and in the diasporic community.

To be sure, India has historically been reluctant to serve as the balancing power to China that Washington seeks in South Asia. Yet the Biden administration should understand India's national interest in preventing regional dominance by Pakistan and China. A hostile Afghanistan supported by Pakistan and China would diminish India's positive regional influence and further place New Delhi at the mercy of its rivals. China's outreach to the Taliban also reaffirms the necessity for future conversations about mitigating Chinese influence in the broader Indo-Pacific as part of continuing dialogue among Australia, India, Japan, and America, also known as the [Quad](#).

The Biden administration should also consider listing the Taliban as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In 2002, then-President George W. Bush [listed the Taliban as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity \(SDGT\)](#) to limit its access to the U.S. financial system, but the Taliban never appeared on the State Department's FTO list. An FTO would be a stronger designation as it [institutes](#) a visa ban, requires U.S. banks to block the assets of the organization, and [establishes](#) criminal prohibitions on any U.S. person who provides the FTO with material support. Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan last year, Republicans in Congress [introduced a bill](#) arguing that the Taliban [fit the criteria](#) of an FTO and therefore warrant inclusion on the FTO list.

Yet the Biden administration has so far refused to add the Taliban to the list, likely [fearing](#) that such a step would undermine talks between Washington and Kabul. Given the Taliban's continued rejection of international calls for reform, however, the White House should reconsider the value of talks.

Recent meetings between representatives from Beijing and Kabul threaten to subvert American interests for peace and stability in Asia. China's actions undermine U.S. leverage and further legitimize the Taliban's control of Afghanistan.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Nigeria: armed gangs working w/militants
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nigeria-says-armed-gangs-in-north-are-working-with-militants/2022/04/13/7d04117a-bb4e-11ec-a92d-c763de818c21_story.html
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria — Armed gangs attacking remote communities in Nigeria's troubled northwest are now working with extremist rebels who have waged a decade-long insurgency in the country's northeast, a top government official said Wednesday.</p> <p>The gunmen and the Islamist rebels are in "an unholy handshake," Nigeria's Minister of Information Lai Mohammed told reporters, for the first time confirming a collaboration that security analysts have warned of.</p>

The result of the alliance is the recent deadly train attack near Abuja, Nigeria's capital, said the minister. Explosives were used to blow up the rail track in that attack in which eight passengers were killed and more than 100 were abducted and remain missing.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with 206 million people, has been battling violence in its troubled north and an alliance between the two groups could worsen the crisis, analysts told The Associated Press.

The security crisis is dominated by two groups: bandits many of whom are formerly herdsmen now carrying arms and Islamic extremist rebels of the Boko Haram group and its breakaway faction the Islamic State in West Africa Province.

The partnership between the groups "might drive further attacks on innocent civilians and state infrastructure," said Oluwale Ojewale of the Africa-focused Institute of Security Studies, as the extremists move their insurgency beyond the northeast where they had been largely restricted for many years.

With the military already fighting factions of the extremists, Nigeria's security situation is already "dangerous enough," said Confidence MacHarry with the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence security firm.

"Adding Boko Haram to the terror problem in the northwest would greatly stretch the security forces to more than its capacity," said MacHarry.

Nigeria's security crisis continued Wednesday with the abduction of four female students by an armed gang that attacked their school in northwest Zamfara state and the killing of 23 persons in northcentral Benue state, local authorities said.

"It is becoming increasingly glaring every day that my people are now an endangered species and so we can no longer wait for help from anywhere," Benue governor Samuel Ortom said, repeating his appeal for residents to be allowed to bear arms to "defend themselves."

The persistent violence, including the killing of more than 100 villagers in the northcentral Plateau state during the weekend, has raised further doubts about the Nigerian government's ability to restore peace in volatile areas despite having declared the armed gangs as terrorist organizations.

The major problem, though, is "the political will and the will to act," said security analyst MacHarry. "Boosting the capacity of security services to respond to security crisis is one thing, but actually responding to the crisis is another," he said.

Responding to such criticisms, Nigeria's Minister of Defence Bashir Magashi said the government is still in control.

"We are really on top of the situation," Magashi said. "We are planning hard and we will get it out as soon as possible."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Israel: arrest; man planned to join IS Syria
SOURCE	https://www.timesofisrael.com/rahat-teen-arrested-for-planning-to-join-islamic-state-in-syria/
GIST	<p>An 18-year-old man from the southern Bedouin town of Rahat was arrested last month for planning to join the Islamic State jihadist group in Syria, police announced Wednesday.</p> <p>According to a statement, Bashar Alglawe "intensively consumed content identified with the terror organization and supported the organization's ideas and goals."</p> <p>Alglawe allegedly made contact with members of Islamic State in Syria in order to fight among the group's ranks. Police also said he sought to obtain a weapon upon his planned arrival in Syria.</p>

He is set to be brought Thursday to the Beersheba District Court, when he is expected to be formally indicted.

“The Shin Bet security service and the Israel Police take very seriously any involvement or affiliation of Israeli citizens in terrorist activities, including the Islamic State,” the statement said.

The announcement comes amid a [wave of arrests of alleged Islamic State members](#) following two deadly terror attacks last month — in [Hadera](#) and [Beersheba](#) — by Arab Israelis thought to have been inspired by the jihadist group.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for both attacks, but it did not appear the terrorists had been instructed by it to commit them.

Last week, Defense Minister Benny Gantz signed an order to [hold](#) an Israeli citizen suspected of being an Islamic State operative in administrative detention for four months.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/13 Montana: youth-led climate lawsuit to trial
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/13/young-people-montana-fossil-fuels-climate-crisis
GIST	<p>When Grace Gibson-Snyder was 13, she launched an independent project in her home town of Missoula, Montana, to encourage restaurants not to use single-use plastic containers. She found that youth activism enabled her to press the adults in her life to take the climate crisis seriously. Even if she was too young to vote, she could still be heard.</p> <p>Three years later Gibson-Snyder upped the ante by teaming up with 15 other young people on a novel approach to climate activism: to sue the state of Montana for failing to protect their generation from irreversible harm brought by the climate crisis.</p> <p>Their case, <i>Held v State of Montana</i>, argues that state lawmakers have prioritized the business interests of the fossil fuel industry over their future. When their case is heard next February, it will be the first in a wave of youth-led climate lawsuits to successfully go to trial. Experts say a decision in favor of the 16 youth plaintiffs could have sweeping implications across the country, setting guard rails for how politicians are able to protect the interests of extractive corporations.</p> <p>“The world is literally burning all around them, and nothing’s being done about it,” said Nate Bellinger, a senior staff attorney with Our Children’s Trust, the non-profit law firm that is representing the youth plaintiffs. “Not only is the state not doing enough, but the state is continuing to affirmatively promote the fossil fuel industry and development.”</p> <p>The 16 young people, who were between the ages of two and 18 when they filed the lawsuit in March 2020, have already felt the impacts of climate change, from dangerous air quality brought by wildfires to the extreme drought that jeopardizes some of their family-owned cattle ranches. As these environmental consequences mount, young people have emerged as a leading force in the climate activism movement.</p> <p>In Montana in particular, the young activists face a political system that is deeply entrenched with the fossil fuel industry. Policy experts say Montana officials have shaped state laws around the financial interests of the energy companies, even while the science on the worsening consequences of climate change has been available and widely circulated.</p> <p>The most notable change occurred in 2011, when the legislature made it easier for fossil fuel companies to increase drilling and prevented agencies from considering how future extraction projects would contribute</p>

to climate change. The move essentially hamstrung future climate legislation by placing a gag rule on questions related to environmental impact. That same year Montana withdrew from the Western Climate Initiative, an agreement between western states and parts of Canada to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Anne Hedges, the director of policy and legislative affairs at the Montana Environmental Information Center, says that over the past 20 years the state legislature has undercut any progress that might have been made toward exploring renewable or non-extractive energy options.

“[Legislators] just don’t want anything to compete with coal,” she said. “The majority is committed to continuing down the path of burning coal.”

With six coalmines and four private coal plants, Montana is the sixth-largest coal producer in the US. It also has four petroleum refineries and is one of the [largest consumers of oil and gas](#) in the United States. Since 2003, Montana has received nearly \$650m in disbursements from oil and gas extraction on mostly public lands, making it the eighth highest total in the country.

Hedges is adamant that the contributions from fossil fuel corporations don’t just pad the campaign coffers of elected officials – they keep them in power. Over the past 20 years, oil and gas campaign contributions have totaled nearly \$450,000. But members of the legislature are not the only ones assisting fossil fuel corporations despite increasingly dire climate change impacts, such as drought, shorter winter seasons and increased air pollution.

For instance, in 2020 the Montana Public Service Commission, the agency tasked with supervising public utilities and pipelines, was [found](#) to have undermined smaller solar projects in the state by favoring NorthWestern energy, the state’s primary energy utility company. “I call them out of control,” Hedges says. “They are only interested in building new gas plants and holding on to the Colstrip plant [in south-east Montana] for ever.”

One of the largest recipients of fossil fuel contributions is Steve Fitzpatrick, a representative from Great Falls, who pushed through contracts to keep power plants open in previous legislative sessions. Another is Barry Usher, a Republican representative from Billings, who sponsored legislation to extend funding to the state coal board and lower the tax rate of coal companies over the objections of local governments, Hedges said.

Then there’s Duane Ankney, a Republican senator from Colstrip, a town of 2,500 people located in south-east Montana, who helped [construct](#) the Rosebud coalmine in the 1980s. Ankney has passed dozens of bills that offer financial and regulatory benefits to the fossil fuel extraction industry, Hedges says, even [attempting](#) to eliminate the board of environmental review in a 2017 bill that was ultimately vetoed.

The legislature also approves the governor’s nominee to the state [oil and gas board](#). “They’re there to rubber-stamp what the industry requests,” Hedges says. The voices of constituents who live near or recreate in an area slated for extraction are ignored, she adds. “It really has been limited to just people who have a financial interest in oil and gas who are allowed to be on that board.”

The oil and gas industry is particularly adept at recognizing who their allies will be in state legislatures, says Matthew Goldberg, an associate research scientist at the Yale program on climate change communication at Yale University. Goldberg has studied how oil and gas corporations motivate legislators to vote against the environment, and says that fossil fuel extraction companies do not necessarily look to persuade legislators with campaign contributions and lobbying funds, but to reinforce policy positions that harm the environment.

“If this is a recurring cycle, where they’re being, in a sense, rewarded for their anti-environmental votes, then you can see how that can pile up where there’s this creation of an incentive to do so over and over across election cycles,” Goldberg said.

	<p>The young people hoping to break that cycle in Montana are part of a larger youth-led movement seeking to untangle the fossil fuel industry's grip on local and state government. But so far, activists have seen uneven success. At least 17 Republican attorneys general, including Montana's, have attempted to block an earlier and ongoing youth climate lawsuit, Juliana v United States, saying that the economic implications of a finding in favor of the plaintiffs would jeopardize state economies. The Juliana case, which was filed in 2015, may head to trial next year if a federal judge finds that the young people have legal standing.</p> <p>For Gibson-Snyder, who is now 18 and preparing to attend college in the fall, the case serves multiple goals – to increase government accountability, to make young people's voices heard, and to protect the environment.</p> <p>"We're just hoping that the courts will help the government fulfil their duty to protect the constitutional rights of individuals, especially the youth, including myself and our other plaintiffs," Gibson-Snyder said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Lightning-sparked forest fires to increase
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/apr/14/lightning-sparked-forest-fires-set-to-increase-in-north-america
GIST	<p>Ninety per cent of forest fires in the boreal forests of northern Canada and Alaska are triggered by lightning with research showing weather conditions play a huge role in determining which strikes are fire-starters. As the climate warms, these weather conditions are expected to become more prevalent, significantly increasing the ignition efficiency of lightning strikes.</p> <p>For every 10,000 lightning strikes in northern North America, between two and five will trigger a forest fire. But what causes one lightning strike to be a damp squib and another to spark a blaze? Researchers looked at forest fire outbreaks in the boreal forests between 2001 and 2018 and assessed the influence of weather conditions, tree type and landscape features on the probability of lightning triggering a fire. Their results, published in Environmental Research Letters, suggest weather conditions were a key driver with higher temperatures, lower rainfall and low humidity all greatly increasing the chances of a lightning-induced blaze.</p> <p>As global climate warms, fire-friendly weather conditions are to become more common in this region, and the researchers estimate that when the projected doubling in lightning strikes is taken into account, there could be up to 65% more lightning-generated fires in the region for every 1C temperature rise.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Wealthiest pay 3.4% of income in taxes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/13/wealthiest-americans-tax-income-propublica-investigation
GIST	<p>Between 2014 and 2018, the 25 wealthiest Americans collectively earned \$401bn, but paid just \$13.6bn – about 3.4% of that – in taxes, according to a bombshell ProPublica investigation into the finances of the wealthiest Americans released on Wednesday.</p> <p>The investigation is the latest in a series ProPublica started in June 2021 that looks at the tax records of the top 0.001% wealthiest Americans. This installment uses a trove of tax filings from 2013 to 2018 to dive into the wealth of the 400 richest Americans, all of whom earn more than \$110m a year. It found that the wealthy benefit from lower tax rates on financial assets and deductions from charitable contributions to keep their taxes low.</p> <p>The difference in tax rates between the wealthiest Americans and the average worker comes down to two critical factors, according to the investigation: first, the wealthy have their income taxed at a lower rate because much of their wealth is accumulated through investments, like stocks; and second, the wealthy are able to use large charitable donations to get huge deductions.</p>

Instead of the standard paycheck that most American workers get, which includes deductions for social security and Medicare taxes, the wealthiest Americans get their income through financial assets, like stocks, that are generally taxed at a lower rate. The long-term capital gains rate has been 20% since 2013.

Billionaires in tech pay the lowest tax rate, an average of 17% of their income, largely because their wealth comes from such investment income. [Bill Gates](#), whose income from 2013 to 2018 was an average of \$2.85bn a year, paid an average effective federal income tax rate of 18.4%. Lauren Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, earned an average of \$1.57bn and paid an average tax rate of 14.8%. Ten of the top 15 earners on the list are billionaires who made their money in tech.

In comparison, the average single worker earning \$45,000 paid an average tax rate of 21%. A married couple with one child who earns \$200,000 paid a rate of 26%. In 2018, the highest top rate on ordinary income, which excludes investments, was 37%, yet the average tax rate for the 400 wealthiest Americans was 22% from 2013 to 2018.

Executives and founders of private equity companies, of which there are 43 on the list, can get taxed at a lower rate through a loophole that allows them to report fees from managing clients' money as an investment income, which is taxed at a lower rate than ordinary income.

Along with getting taxed at a lower rate through having an investment income, the wealthiest Americans can also write off huge chunks of their income by deducting large charitable donations. Michael Bloomberg, who earned an average of \$2.05bn a year from 2013 to 2018, had 66% of his income deducted, giving him one of the lowest tax rates of the group – 4.1%.

ProPublica noted that when reached for comments, no one named in the story disputed figures reported in the investigation, and few provided responses. One spokesperson for Ken Griffin, chief executive of hedge fund company Citadel, said that the IRS data “significantly understate[s]” what Griffin pays because the rate was lowered by charitable contributions and does not include local and state taxes. A spokesperson for Mark Zuckerberg said, “Mark has always paid the taxes he is required to pay”, while a spokesperson for Bloomberg similarly said that he “pays the minimum tax rate on all federal, state, local and international taxable income as prescribed by law”.

The disparity between the sky-high incomes of the wealthiest Americans and their tax rates is something that has already caught the attention of lawmakers. Last month, Joe Biden proposed a new tax on households making more than \$100m a year. The plan, called the “[billionaire minimum income tax](#)”, would impose a 20% minimum tax on an individual's realized and unrealized income, which would cover investment income.

“In 2021 alone, America's more than 700 billionaires saw their wealth increase by \$1tn, yet in a typical year, billionaires like these would pay just 8% of their total realized and unrealized income in taxes. A firefighter or teacher can pay double that tax rate,” the White House said in a statement detailing the plan.

At the recent meeting of the [Patriotic Millionaires](#), a group made up of individuals with high net worth who believe the wealthy should pay more taxes, a topic of conversation was the tidal shift over taxing the wealthy that seems to be happening.

“No one was talking about the taxing the rich when we started,” said Morris Pearl, chair of the Patriotic Millionaires and a former managing director at BlackRock. “We have seen a huge change. You have a president talking about taxing the rich, people are talking about wealth taxes – those weren't even fringe ideas 10 years ago. I'm not saying it's going to happen and pass into law but there are conversations at the highest levels.”

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HEADLINE	04/13 Traffic stop: police pull over driverless car
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/13/san-francisco-police-pull-over-driverless-car/

GIST	<p>What started as an ordinary traffic stop in San Francisco turned into anything but after police discovered no one was driving the Chevy Bolt they had pulled over.</p> <p>An Instagram video captured the stop, as police were initially confused.</p> <p>The vehicle was being operated by Cruise — a San Francisco-based company offering a robotaxi service with self-driving cars. The company began operations in late January and is financially backed by General Motors, according to the company's website.</p> <p>The police stopped the car because it was driving with no headlights.</p> <p>The company said the vehicle “yielded to the police vehicle, then pulled over to the nearest safe location for the traffic stop.”</p> <p>Cruise added that an officer contacted Cruise personnel and did not issue a citation.</p> <p>The company said they work closely with SFPD on how to interact with their vehicles — they include a dedicated phone number for officers to call in this situation.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Tacoma mother warns fentanyl OD deaths
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/my-son-is-now-a-statistic-tacoma-mother-warns-of-fentanyl-as-fatal-overdoses-soar
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Drug-related overdose deaths in Washington topped 2,000 in 2021, representing a 66% increase compared to 2019, according to the Department of Health (DOH).</p> <p>The major cause: fentanyl overdoses, which have increase tenfold since 2016, DOH says.</p> <p>Nobody knows more about the impact of fentanyl than Jasmine Robinson. She lost her 21-year-old son Jaylen 18 months ago to what the Pierce County medical examiner called an "accidental overdose" of fentanyl.</p> <p>"My son is now a statistic, you know, it's very sad because he had his whole life ahead of him," she said.</p> <p>Jasmine wears some of his ashes in a small locket around her neck.</p> <p>"His friend said, ‘Let’s do a Percocet, and I know someone who we can get it from,’” she explained. "They got it on Snapchat; Jaylen paid, I think, 20 dollars, and he took one pill and he died."</p> <p>But it wasn’t a Percocet—it was a black market version of fentanyl that can be 100 times stronger than opioids like Percocet, Vicodin and OxyContin.</p> <p>"When they did the autopsy, only a quarter of the pill dissolved, and he was 285 pounds and 6'3"," she said. "A little bit is all it took."</p> <p>Robinson said when it was explained to her that her son took fentanyl, she had no idea what it was. Now, she is on a personal mission to warn parents and their kids about the dangers of fentanyl.</p> <p>"It appears this generation is just willing to pop any pill in their mouth, and it can kill them," she said.</p> <p>The head of Seattle's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) division said drug cartels are competing against each other to get as many fentanyl pills onto the streets of the Northwest as possible.</p> <p>"China and Mexico are flooding our city streets with poison," said DEA agent Frank Tarentino. "They are making a lot of money; they are looking to drive addiction, fentanyl is highly addicting."</p>

He said in the past four months, agents have seized 1.1 million fentanyl pills and nearly 200 firearms in the Northwest.

"They don't care about the users; for them, it's all about, 'How much fentanyl I can get on the city streets,'" he said.

Robinson told FOX 13 she's frustrated with Tacoma Police, because she has evidence on her son's phone that shows who sold the pill that killed him.

"Who knows who else that drug dealer gave a pill too, who died after Jaylen died? Those people could have been saved," she said.

Jaylen's friends told her the dealer who sold the pill died of a drug overdose one month ago.

It's hard to convict a drug dealer who is out to make money for the death of a user. But King County prosecutors have several open cases, where they are trying to convict the seller for substance abuse homicide.

With fentanyl deaths soaring across the country and locally in King County, prosecutors are working to build up more cases against drug dealers to charge them with controlled substance homicide.

"What we need to do is show a direct link between that drug delivery and the drug that caused the person's death," said senior deputy prosecutor, Joe Marchesano.

Prosecutors may get help from an unlikely source—the drug fentanyl itself.

"The double-edged sword of fentanyl is that you can overdose on it incredibly easily," said Marchesano. "It means it's a much more provable case for us."

"A majority of people dying from overdose tend to be male and 45 years old or younger, and the increase in overdose deaths is fastest growing among Black, Latinx, and Native American/Alaska Native people," reads a statement from DOH.

"People say, 'Oh, he's in a better place – well, I don't feel that way, he was in a good place with us and here,'" said Robinson. "It's a wasted life; he died at 21, that's way too young, he was just getting started."

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HEADLINE	04/13 Baltimore firefighter deaths ruled homicides
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/deaths-of-baltimore-firefighters-in-blaze-ruled-homicides/
GIST	<p>The deaths of three Baltimore firefighters who got trapped in a burning vacant home when it partially collapsed were determined to be homicides, city police said Wednesday.</p> <p>Investigators from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives also classified the January fire as “incendiary,” according to a Wednesday news release. That means it was set or spread into an area where flames should not be and involves a violation of law, whether intentional or not.</p> <p>A person of interest has been identified, and authorities said additional tips from the public are not needed.</p> <p>“The incendiary classification is an important step forward in this investigation,” said Toni M. Crosby, the ATF special agent in charge.</p>

	<p>Four firefighters were battling a blaze the morning of Jan. 24 when part of the unoccupied, three-story rowhouse collapsed.</p> <p>Paramedics/firefighters Kenneth Lacayo and Kelsey Sadler were pulled from the fire and brought to a trauma hospital, where they were both pronounced dead. Lt. Paul Butrim was recovered from the building and pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>EMT/firefighter John McMaster was initially put on life support, but he was released from the hospital a few days later.</p> <p>Maryland's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner performed autopsies on the three deceased firefighters' remains and found that they died from injuries sustained while trying to extinguish the fire.</p> <p>Thousands of firefighters and others from around the country gathered in Baltimore on Feb. 2 to mourn the deaths. The fatal blaze — and another in St. Louis 11 days earlier — prompted officials to look at ways to reduce the risks of fires at vacant homes.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/14 Germany: 4 arrests; blackout, kidnap plan
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/4-germans-arrested-over-extremist-blackout-kidnapping-plan/
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — Four people were arrested in Germany and weapons were seized in an investigation into suspected anti-government extremists who allegedly planned to cause a long nationwide blackout and kidnap well-known figures including the country's health minister, authorities said Thursday.</p> <p>Prosecutors in Koblenz and Rhineland-Palatinate's state criminal police office said that raids were carried out at 20 properties across the country Wednesday following an investigation that was launched in October. The suspects were members of a chat group called "United Patriots" on the Telegram messenger service.</p> <p>Investigators said the suspects they identified were associated with the protest movement against coronavirus restrictions and with the Reich Citizens movement, which disputes the legitimacy of the post-World War II German constitution and, by extension, the current government. In all, 12 people are under investigation.</p> <p>Investigators said in a statement that the group's declared aim was to destroy Germany's electricity supply facilities and cause a long blackout, with the goal of producing "conditions similar to civil war" and ultimately overthrowing the country's democratic system.</p> <p>Police seized 22 firearms, including a Kalashnikov rifle, along with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, thousands of euros in cash, and numerous gold bars and silver coins.</p> <p>The group allegedly planned to kidnap well-known public figures. Investigators said those included Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, the German news agency dpa reported.</p> <p>Lauterbach said he was "appalled" to hear the news and thanked investigators.</p> <p>"The whole thing shows that corona protests have not just become more radical, but that it is now about more than corona — that there is an attempt here to destabilize the state," he told reporters during a visit to Husum on Germany's North Sea coast. "This is a small minority in our society, but highly dangerous."</p> <p>"This will not influence my own work," Lauterbach said, adding that he will continue trying to balance the interests of people who want looser measures against COVID-19 with those who want stricter ones.</p> <p>The suspects, all German citizens, are accused of preparing a serious act of violence and of violating weapons laws.</p>

HEADLINE	04/14 Spokane task force: rise in gun violence
SOURCE	https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/apr/14/a-multi-layered-issue-woodward-spokane-police-to-f/
GIST	<p>A few days after four people were wounded in two separate shootings this past weekend, members of the Spokane City Council looked to Spokane Police Chief Craig Meidl for answers to the city's apparent rise in gun violence.</p> <p>Finding those solutions will take a community effort, however, as evidenced by a new task force Meidl is helping put together at Mayor Nadine Woodward's request.</p> <p>It's remains unclear at this point who might serve on the mayor's task force or when it will be up and running.</p> <p>Whatever form the task force takes, Woodward said she hopes the groups can come up with ideas similar to Seattle's "High Utilizer" initiative.</p> <p>As part of the program, the Seattle City Attorney's Office is aiming to aggregate numerous misdemeanors into felony charges for 118 people suspected of committing more than 2,400 misdemeanors in the last five years, according to the Seattle Times.</p> <p>"We have, I believe, the same situation here," Woodward said. "I think there's a small number of chronic offenders who are committing the majority of quality of life crimes, the business property crimes, the car thefts and car prowlings and all those kinds of things, and we need to go after that."</p> <p>Meidl has met with department heads, crime analysts and others to lay out an initial plan for a task force, said police spokesperson Julie Humphreys, adding that the police department is committed to working with community and criminal justice partners toward innovative solutions.</p> <p>There were 40 shootings in Spokane in the first three months of 2022, according to the Spokane Police Department, on pace to eclipse the 151 shootings recorded last year. Eighteen of those 40 were classified as drive-by shootings, up from 10 over the same time period last year.</p> <p>April has followed the trend.</p> <p>This a few days after a Saturday that saw three people seriously injured during a reported drive-by shooting at Lucky's Irish Pub on West Sprague Avenue and a man shot twice in a separate shooting on East Queen Avenue. Another man was shot and killed early Tuesday morning in north Spokane near Maxwell Avenue and Lincoln Street.</p> <p>Spokane Police recorded 91 shootings in 2020 and 52 in 2019.</p> <p>There's no one reason for the rise in the gun violence throughout the city, Meidl said Monday during the council's Public Safety and Community Health Committee meeting.</p> <p>"The huge spike we've seen has been, we believe, driven largely by gangs – one gang versus another gang – but you always have these other shootings that have always occurred," he said. "It can be anything from domestic violence to drugs to arguments to just disagreements. It runs the full gamut."</p> <p>While Spokane's gangs first emerged around the 1980s, most involved nowadays are second- or third-generation members who were born in Spokane and come from gang-impacted areas, said Officer Adam Valdez, a member of the Spokane Regional Safe Streets Task Force.</p> <p>Valdez said he has spoken to people as old as 25 and as young as 9 or 10, noting the Safe Streets Task Force has largely seen middle- or high-school youths looking for this lifestyle.</p>

Gang-on-gang violence most often occurs due to rivalries, drug-related issues or feuds old enough for some younger members to not understand, Valdez said.

A lot of violent conflicts start on the internet, sometimes from perceived insults on social media. Some members believe they're destined for either death or prison, both Valdez and Meidl said.

"When you're trying to deal with that and work through that with them, it takes a community to wrap around them," Meidl said.

Valdez added, "If kids want out of the lifestyle, there's ways to get out."

Whereas the gangs of old would have confrontations or possibly a fight in the event of a conflict, Valdez said today's youths more quickly "have an immediate and violent reaction."

And while civilian targets are "pretty rare," there's always a concern of crossfire between gangs, such as in a drive-by, Valdez said.

"Nowadays, these younger ones will immediately have no problem pulling out a gun or flashing a gun or shooting at a rival because they want to get that street cred," Valdez said. "Multiple young gang members tell me they don't have an issue shooting at somebody or killing somebody because they know they don't get a lot of time, and once they come out, they get a street cred."

Gangs "generally go where the moneymaking is"; nowadays, that's drugs, human trafficking and gun sales, Valdez said.

Woodward said she sees the task force working in tandem with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration's Operation Engage, a program that has identified the Spokane region as one of 11 crisis areas for combatting drug crime, given the significant spike in fentanyl seizures.

"Spokane is a narcotics distribution hub for drugs coming over the border into Spokane because of our proximity to Canada but also I-90, so that distribution can go east from here," Woodward said. "It's a problem, but it is fueling a lot of shootings that we're experiencing right now."

The Spokane Police Department has also noticed a rising trend in the number of arrests for unlawful possession of a firearm, with many of those arrests involving convicted felons, Meidl said.

Police have made 30 arrests to date in 2022 for unlawful possession of a firearm. The police department made 89 such arrests through all of last year.

While officers are making arrests for these types of charges, Meidl said the defendants are often released on their own recognizance by the courts shortly after they are booked. As a result, Meidl said he doesn't believe the criminal justice system is "sending the right message."

"We need accountability in our courts as well," Woodward said. "It's a multilayered issue that we continue to work on."

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HEADLINE	04/14 Germany seizes world's largest yacht
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/14/germany-superyacht-seized-russian-oligarch-dilbar/
GIST	<p>The shipbuilder behind the world's largest yacht describes it as "one of the most complex and challenging yachts ever built," with "entertainment and recreation spaces never before seen on" such a vessel, and an interior of "rare and exclusive luxury materials."</p> <p>It has two helipads, the largest yacht pool ever built, and it can accommodate 36 guests and 96 staff. And this week, it was impounded by German authorities for its ties to a Russian oligarch.</p>

Germany's federal police [said](#) Tuesday that "through extensive investigations despite offshore concealment," it found that the yacht is owned by Gulbakhor Ismailova, the sister of Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov.

After police confirmed with Brussels that the vessel's owner was sanctioned, the superyacht — named Dilbar, after Usmanov's mother, according to the U.S. Treasury Department — was impounded. It is being [held](#) in the Port of Hamburg in Germany.

The yacht is registered in the Cayman Islands, according to the Treasury Department, and worth between \$600 million and \$735 million, with an estimated annual running cost of \$60 million. At 15,917 tons, it is the world's largest yacht by internal volume, according to the ship's maker, Lürssen, which [touts](#) its "classic profile with a light ivory hull and bronze accents."

Usmanov is "known to be close to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin as well as Dmitry Medvedev, the Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia and former President and Prime Minister of Russia," the Treasury Department said, alleging that his ties to the Kremlin "enrich him and enable his luxurious lifestyle."

In the early days of the invasion, President Biden warned Russian oligarchs: "We are joining with our European allies to find and seize your yachts, your luxury apartments, your private jets."

The United States [said](#) on March 3 that it had sanctioned Usmanov, alleging he was among the "key elites" allowing Putin to wage his war on Ukraine. Experts from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [determined in a fact-finding report](#) published Wednesday that Russia broke international humanitarian law by deliberately targeting civilians during its invasion of Ukraine. The United States and other nations have accused Russia of committing war crimes there, and Biden on Tuesday said Putin was committing "[genocide](#)" in Ukraine.

Usmanov, 68, is the 86th-richest person in the world, with an estimated fortune of \$19.1 billion, according to the [Bloomberg Billionaires Index](#). He has "vast holdings across multiple sectors" of Russia's economy and internationally, the Treasury Department said, including a 49 percent stake in USM, a holding company that controls Russia's largest iron ore producer, according to Bloomberg.

A representative for Usmanov was not immediately available, and USM did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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HEADLINE	04/13 Assault on postal worker, then mail stopped
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/usps-mail-attacks-california.html
GIST	<p>SANTA MONICA, Calif. — When their mail stopped arriving about a week ago, residents on a neat block near the beach on the west side of Los Angeles County were perplexed.</p> <p>At first, said Charlotte Jay, "I just thought I hadn't got any." A day or so passed. She was expecting a certified letter. Then a neighbor tipped her off: Their mail was suspended.</p> <p>Ms. Jay added, "I was like: 'What?'"</p> <p>The disruption had been explained in a letter from the United States Postal Service, but some residents said they had not initially received or seen it.</p> <p>According to the note, delivery service had been halted to "all addresses located on the 1300 block of 14th Street" following multiple "assaults and threats of assault" against postal workers by a person in the neighborhood.</p>

“The safety of our employees and the mail they deliver to you is our highest concern,” the letter said, adding that until service was resumed, residents could collect their mail at a nearby post office.

“The entire block? It’s an extreme measure,” Ms. Jay, a stock trader, said Tuesday afternoon outside her apartment, where she had just returned from a walk with her brown terrier mix.

She added: “I was shocked, and I was angry.”

Service to the area resumed on Tuesday, but the episode has left lingering questions of residents’ expectation of mail delivery, one of the few remaining constants in a world upended ([and hastened to anger](#)) by the coronavirus pandemic. It has also brought into focus the right to safety for postal workers who, like other essential workers, [have battled through the past two years](#), hand delivering the nation’s letters, bills and paychecks, day in and out.

The police confirmed that on Jan. 19, a man assaulted a mail carrier in Santa Monica with a broomstick. “The victim sustained a minor injury to his arm and did not require medical attention,” the Santa Monica Police Department said in a statement.

Though the Postal Service has cited episodes involving “three separate letter carriers” in Santa Monica, the police said that they had received information about only one attack.

A suspect was arrested and charged in the Jan. 19 assault, the police said, but those charges were later dropped after the victim decided not to proceed. That same suspect was arrested on April 6 on unrelated charges of “misdemeanor vandalism and possession of drug paraphernalia,” the police said.

The police said authorities were trying to locate other postal workers who may have been victims as part of their continuing investigation.

“It’s unfortunate that these three carriers experienced this,” Natashi Garvins, a spokeswoman for the Postal Service said by phone on Wednesday. The service, she added, can and does occasionally suspend mail delivery — though she said she could not provide numbers or say whether any had been made previously in response to attacks on mail carriers.

“It could occur for various reasons,” Ms. Garvins said, adding that the Postal Service would always attempt to provide alternative means for people to collect their mail.

In the case of Santa Monica, she added, the service had decided to cancel the mail to the entire block because the person responsible for the three episodes “could be anywhere” in the area.

Harassment of mail carriers, however, does not appear to be isolated.

In New York, the police began an investigation last June after a mail carrier [was attacked](#) by two people on his route in Brooklyn. In Providence, R.I., a federal grand jury [indicted a man](#) in January on charges that he had attacked and robbed a postal worker in September. In Arizona, a man [assaulted a postal worker](#) in May after she requested that he provide his identification.

Marjon Barrigan Husted, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Postal Inspector, said on Wednesday that she was unaware of any recent increases in such episodes in Los Angeles.

The American Postal Workers’ Union and the National Association of Letter Carriers did not immediately return requests for comment.

Some residents said they were familiar with the person they believe had attacked the postal workers. They described him as transient and erratic. One man, a valet worker who asked not to be named to protect his safety, said that he had seen the man wielding a golf club at a postal worker. Another said that after the Jan. 19 attack, his regular mail carrier had suddenly vanished.

	<p>Cori Newman, 49, a manager at a local restaurant, said that the person in question had approached her several times at work, as well as after hours in the neighboring car park.</p> <p>“I lived in Santa Monica a long time ago as a child and never felt it was dangerous ever before,” Ms. Newman said. Now, she said, she keeps a baseball bat and pepper spray behind the bar. “If I have to use it,” she said, “I have to use it.”</p> <p>Others, however, said that, aside from the recent episodes, the neighborhood was largely peaceful. “I just think it’s sad,” said Jim Price, 55.</p> <p>“This is Santa Monica,” he added. “It’s safe; it’s a nice city seaside community.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Charge: terrorist attack mass transit
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/13/nyregion/brooklyn-subway-shooting#what-to-know-about-the-federal-crime-frank-james-is-charged-with
GIST	<p>The federal statute that Frank R. James will be prosecuted under is an updated version of a 1940 law meant to combat train sabotage that was incorporated into the Patriot Act when Congress reauthorized the sweeping, post-9/11 national security law in 2005.</p> <p>As Breon S. Peace, the U.S. attorney in Brooklyn, noted at the news conference announcing Mr. James’s arrest on Wednesday, the statute — 18 U.S.C. 1992 — prohibits terrorist and other violent attacks on mass transit systems like the New York City subway.</p> <p>A conviction can result in a life sentence if, as one section of the statute says, “the railroad on-track equipment or mass transportation vehicle was carrying a passenger or employee at the time of the offense.”</p> <p>Daniel C. Richman, a professor at Columbia Law School and a former federal prosecutor, said that the statute would be a logical one to apply — and that it potentially carries the most severe punishment.</p> <p>“This really captures what happened,” Professor Richman said.</p> <p>The statute bans “terrorist attacks and other violence against railroad carriers and against mass transportation systems on land, on water, or through the air.”</p> <p>It has been invoked in several federal cases in New York City, including one involving the detonation of a pipe bomb in an underground subway tunnel near Times Square in 2017. It was also used to prosecute four men who were convicted in a 2006 plot to blow up jet fuel tanks at John F. Kennedy International Airport. As with the Brooklyn subway shooting, neither case resulted in any deaths.</p> <p>The law’s 1940 predecessor, known as the train-wrecking statute, authorized the prosecution of “whoever shall willfully derail, disable, or wreck any train, engine, motor unit, or car used, operated, or employed in interstate or foreign commerce by any railroad.”</p> <p>Congress passed that law a year after dozens of people were killed and more than 100 more were injured when a luxury passenger train traveling from Chicago to Oakland, Calif., derailed in Nevada because of sabotage to the tracks. The case remains unsolved.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Fentanyl pills hidden in Snohomish Co. jail
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/deputies-find-more-than-100-fentanyl-pills-hidden-within-snohomish-co-jail
GIST	EVERETT, Wash. – Corrections deputies found more than 100 fentanyl pills hidden in a female prison last month.

	<p>Snohomish County officials said the deputies found the drugs hidden on March 20 during a welfare check.</p> <p>The deputy said he saw an inmate suffering from a possible drug-related illness and called for help.</p> <p>The inmate was put on medical watch while officials investigated what happened. The investigation found the inmate was one of three in the unit with a large amount of blue pills.</p> <p>A drug test for all inmates in the unit returned positive for fentanyl.</p> <p>Deputies say one of the inmates had brought them into the facility during booking, she has been charged with introducing contraband into a correctional facility.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Guilty plea: rampage South Hill mall
SOURCE	https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/local/crime/article260360850.html
GIST	<p>A man has pleaded guilty to a 2019 arson at a home in Milton and a burglary spree at the South Hill Mall. Prosecutors said the two incidents were linked by a stolen handgun with a missing safety.</p> <p>The guilty pleas came in two separate Pierce County Superior Court cases brought against 24-year-old Jordan Poisson. Prosecutors accused Poisson of setting his former boss's house on fire, stealing the man's gun and then using it to shoot his way into South Hill Mall the next day.</p> <p>According to court filings, Poisson pleaded guilty Friday to second-degree arson and first-degree burglary in one case and first-degree burglary and second-degree malicious mischief in the other.</p> <p>Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office spokesperson Adam Faber said the defendant's plea deal means Poisson will have a felony conviction for a strike offense under Washington state's three-strike law. The prosecution and defense agreed to a recommended sentence of two years, four months in prison and three years of community custody.</p> <p>The sentencing recommendation would bar him from the South Hill Mall and the home of his former boss. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for May 20.</p> <p>The burglaries at South Hill Mall on July 23, 2019 caused about \$10,000 in damages, and prosecutors accused Poisson of stealing about \$5,000 in merchandise. Surveillance video showed a man dropping into the mall from the ceiling and shooting his way into stores through glass doors and windows.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Subway suspect left ranting video clues
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/prophet-doom-subway-suspect-left-ranting-video-clues-84070986
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- Frank James posted dozens of videos ranting about race, violence and his struggles with mental illness. One stands out for its relative calm: A silent shot of a packed New York City subway car in which he raises his finger to point out passengers, one by one.</p> <p>Even as police arrested James on Wednesday in the Brooklyn subway shooting that wounded 10 people, they were still searching for a motive from a flood of details about the 62-year-old Black man's life.</p> <p>An erratic work history. Arrests for a string of mostly low-level crimes. A storage locker with more ammo. And hours of rambling, bigoted, profanity-laced videos on his YouTube channel that point to a deep, simmering anger.</p> <p>"This nation was born in violence, it's kept alive by violence or the threat thereof, and it's going to die a violent death," says James in a video where he takes on the moniker "Prophet of Doom."</p>

After a 30-hour manhunt, James was arrested without incident after a tipster — thought by police to be James himself — said he could be found near a McDonald's on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Mayor Eric Adams triumphantly proclaimed "We got him!" Police said their top priority was getting the suspect, now charged with a federal terrorism offense, off the streets as they investigate their biggest unanswered question: Why?

A prime trove of evidence, they said, is his YouTube videos. He seems to have opinions about nearly everything — racism in America, New York City's new mayor, the state of mental health services, 9/11, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Black women.

A federal criminal complaint cited one in which James ranted about too many homeless people on the subway and put the blame on New York City's mayor.

"What are you doing, brother?" he said in the video posted March 27. "Every car I went to was loaded with homeless people. It was so bad, I couldn't even stand."

James then railed about the treatment of Black people in an April 6 video cited in the complaint, saying, "And so the message to me is: I should have gotten a gun, and just started shooting."

In a video posted a day before the attack, James criticizes crime against Black people and says things would only change if certain people were "stomped, kicked and tortured" out of their "comfort zone."

Surveillance cameras spotted James entering the subway system turnstiles Tuesday morning, dressed as a maintenance or construction worker in a yellow hard hat and orange working jacket with reflective tape.

Police say fellow riders heard him say only "oops" as he set off one smoke grenade in a crowded subway car as it rolled into a station. He then set off a second smoke grenade and started firing, police said. In the smoke and chaos that ensued, police say James made his getaway by slipping into a R-train going the opposite direction and exited after the first stop.

Left behind at the scene was the gun, extended magazines, a hatchet, detonated and undetonated smoke grenades, a black garbage can, a rolling cart, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van, police said.

That key led investigators to James, and clues to a life of setbacks and anger as he bounced among factory and maintenance jobs, got fired at least twice, moved among Milwaukee, Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York.

Investigators said James had 12 prior arrests in New York and New Jersey from 1990 to 2007, including for possession of burglary tools, criminal sex act, trespassing, larceny and disorderly conduct.

James had no felony convictions and was not prohibited from purchasing or owning a firearm. Police said the gun used in the attack was legally purchased at an Ohio pawn shop in 2011. A search of James' Philadelphia storage unit and apartment turned up at least two types of ammunition, including the kind used with an AR-15 assault-style rifle, a taser and a blue smoke cannister.

Police said James was born and raised in New York City. In his videos, he said he finished a machine shop course in 1983 then worked as a gear machinist at Curtiss-Wright, an aerospace manufacturer in New Jersey, until 1991 when he was hit by a one-two punch of bad news: He was fired from his job and, soon after, his father whom he had lived with in New Jersey died.

Records show James filed a complaint against the aerospace company in federal court soon after he lost his job alleging racial discrimination, but it was dismissed a year later by a judge. He says in one video, without offering specifics, that he "couldn't get any justice for what I went through."

A spokesperson for Curtiss-Wright didn't immediately respond to a call seeking comment.

	<p>James describes going in and out of several mental health facilities, including two in the Bronx borough of New York City in the 1970s.</p> <p>“Mr. Mayor, let me say to you I’m a victim of your mental health program in New York City,” James says in a video earlier this year, adding he is “full of hate, full anger and bitterness.”</p> <p>James says he later was a patient at Bridgeway House, a mental health facility in New Jersey, although that could not be immediately confirmed. Messages left with the facility were not returned.</p> <p>“My goal at Bridgeway in 1997 was to get off Social Security and go back to f----- work,” he says in a video, adding that he enrolled in a college and took a course in computer-aided design and manufacturing.</p> <p>James says he eventually got a job at telecommunications giant Lucent Technologies in Parsippany, New Jersey, but says he ended up getting fired and returned to Bridgeway House, this time not as a patient but as an employee on the maintenance staff. A message seeking comment was sent to Lucent Technologies.</p> <p>“I just want to work. I want to be a person that’s productive,” he said.</p> <p>Touches of that earnest, struggling man showed up after James’ parked car was hit in Milwaukee. Eugene Yarbrough, pastor of Mt. Zion Wings of Glory Church of God in Christ next door to James’ apartment, said James was impressed that the pastor owned up to hitting the car. Neither James nor anyone else was there to see the accident. And James called him up to say so.</p> <p>“I just couldn’t believe it would be him,” Yarbrough said. “But who knows what people will do?”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Police: suspect called tip on himself
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/frank-james-live-subway-shooting-brooklyn-new-york-police-update-video-1697566?utm_source=PushnamiMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=automatic&UTM=1649890694736&subscriberId=614e18b67aeb51cecbe2d56a
GIST	<p>The man suspected in the Brooklyn subway shooting called police on himself, law enforcement officials told the Associated Press.</p> <p>Frank R. James tipped off police to his own whereabouts Wednesday afternoon, after being on the run for some 30 hours, AP reports. James called the NYPD tip line, saying he was inside a McDonalds in Manhattan and for officers to come and get him, two law enforcement officials told the outlet.</p> <p>When officers responded, James already left the McDonalds at 6th Street and First Avenue, NYPD Police Chief Kenneth Corey said during a press conference. Officers found James at a nearby corner, at St. Marks Place and 1st Avenue, and took him into custody.</p> <p>A man named Zack Tahhan said he recognized James on the street Wednesday afternoon and alerted officers. Tahhan told WABC he saw James walking down the sidewalk, placing his bag in the street. Tahhan then made the connection and tried to warn people nearby to get away.</p> <p>"Please, this guy is gonna do something," Tahhan said in an interview with WABC. "People think I am crazy, like nobody tries to believe me. I told them guys, trust me this guy... this is the guy."</p> <p>Tahhan flagged officers who were nearby, and said police then made the arrest.</p> <p>"Thank God we got him," Tahhan said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/12 Train engineer intentional derailment jailed
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-us-navy-los-angeles-4f602ab9a2e801e6a885c8e6d249f3d5

GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — A train engineer who intentionally derailed a locomotive near a U.S. Navy hospital ship that was deployed in Los Angeles harbor to help during the COVID-19 pandemic was sentenced Wednesday to three years in prison, prosecutors said.</p> <p>Eduardo Moreno was also ordered to pay more than \$755,000 in restitution, the U.S. Attorney’s Office said in a statement. Moreno, 46, pleaded guilty in December 2021 to one count of committing a terrorist attack.</p> <p>Moreno, who worked at the Port of Los Angeles, acknowledged in his plea agreement that on March 31, 2020, he drove a locomotive at full speed off the end of the tracks near where the Mercy was docked because he believed it might be involved in a sinister conspiracy, prosecutors said</p> <p>Nobody was hurt, but the derailment caused about \$755,880 in damages. The train also spilled fuel that required a hazardous-materials cleanup.</p> <p>Moreno told port police that he was suspicious of the Mercy “and believed it had an alternate purpose related to COVID-19 or a government takeover,” the U.S. attorney’s office said, citing court documents.</p> <p>Moreno said he knew the derailment would bring media attention, and he wanted to “wake people up,” according to an affidavit filed with the criminal complaint.</p> <p>The train smashed through concrete, steel and chain-link barriers and slid through a parking lot before coming to a stop about 250 yards (228 meters) from the Mercy, officials said.</p> <p>Moreno said he acted alone and hadn’t planned the derailment in advance, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The 1,000-bed Mercy, based at Naval Base San Diego, docked at the Port of Los Angeles in March 2020 to accept non-coronavirus patients to prevent local hospitals from being overwhelmed as cases surged.</p> <p>However, the initial rise in hospitalizations wasn’t as severe as expected. The Mercy’s crew treated about 80 people before departing in mid-May.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/13 Officials: subway shooting suspect arrested
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/nyregion/frank-james-arrested.html
GIST	<p>Frank R. James, who law enforcement officials say perpetrated the worst attack on New York’s subway system in years, was taken into custody Wednesday, more than 24 hours into an expansive search that began after at least 10 people were shot at a Brooklyn train station.</p> <p>“We got him,” said Mayor Eric Adams, the first official to speak at an afternoon news conference. “We got him.”</p> <p>Mr. James was arrested in the East Village, officials said, and was charged in a criminal complaint with committing a terrorist act on a mass transit system. Breon S. Peace, the U.S. attorney for New York’s Eastern District, which brought the charges, said that Mr. James could face life in prison if convicted.</p> <p>Mr. James, 62, wore a solid blue shirt and dark pants as he was led in handcuffs out of the Ninth Precinct on East Fifth Street Wednesday afternoon. He is expected to appear in federal court on Thursday. A court-appointed lawyer for Mr. James did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The police took Frank R. James into custody more than 24 hours into an expansive search that began after at least 10 people were shot on a subway train in Brooklyn on Tuesday.</p> <p>Mr. James was apprehended thanks to a tip that came in from a McDonald’s near Sixth Street and First Avenue, officials said. According to two law enforcement officials with knowledge of the investigation, it appeared that Mr. James had called the police tip line on himself.</p>

“We were able to shrink his world quickly,” said New York’s police commissioner, Keechant Sewell. “There was nowhere left for him to run.”

The capture, which unleashed a cascade of videos and tweets from people who witnessed the arrest or said they helped identify Mr. James, ended a manhunt that began at rush hour on Tuesday morning, after a shooting in the Sunset Park subway station left at least 23 people injured.

The investigation was complicated by the malfunctioning of at least one security camera in the station where the shooting took place. One senior law enforcement official briefed on the investigation said that it appeared none of the security cameras there were in full operation.

Two days before the shooting, New York City Transit workers had reported that the camera system in that station and two adjacent ones were malfunctioning, The Times reported Wednesday, citing transit officials. Maintenance workers traced the problem to a fiber-optic cable connection failure, the Times reported.

But cameras did capture Mr. James entering the subway system on Tuesday morning, at the Kings Highway N-train stop in Brooklyn, said James Essig, the Police Department’s chief of detectives. As an N train approached the 36th Street station, Mr. James, wearing a construction worker’s helmet and vest and a gas mask, threw two smoke grenades onto the floor and unleashed a barrage of gunfire at about 8:30 a.m., officials said.

After the shooting, passengers piled onto an R across the smoke-covered platform. They swarmed out of the 25th Street station, one stop away. Footage showed Mr. James leaving there, Chief Essig said.

Investigators found video of Mr. James entering the Seventh Avenue subway stop in Brooklyn’s Park Slope neighborhood, more than a mile away, around 9:15 a.m. on Tuesday, Chief Essig said.

He evaded law enforcement for over a day.

On the train, the police discovered an array of belongings, including a Glock 9-millimeter handgun, three ammunition magazines, a credit card with Mr. James’s name on it and a key to a U-Haul van.

That vehicle was found at West Seventh Street and Kings Highway in the Gravesend neighborhood late Tuesday afternoon, two blocks from the N-train stop where Mr. James entered the subway and about five miles from the station where the shooting had taken place.

Mr. James reserved and prepaid for the van April 6, and picked it up in Philadelphia on Monday, according to the criminal complaint filed Wednesday in federal court. Around 4:11 a.m. on Tuesday, the day of the shooting, surveillance cameras captured it crossing the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge into Brooklyn.

At 6:12 a.m., according to the complaint, a surveillance camera recorded somebody leaving the van in the place where it was later found, and who was wearing a yellow hard hat and an orange working jacket, carrying a backpack and pulling a rolling bag.

The person matched the description provided by at least one witness to the attack.

The vast manhunt for Mr. James, who has addresses in Philadelphia and Wisconsin, included the broad review of security cameras throughout the subways; a more than 17-block wide canvass in Sunset Park for stores’ surveillance footage; and a search for information on the gun, whose serial number was found in federal records that showed Mr. James had purchased it in 2011.

Investigators seized an empty magazine for a Glock handgun like the one used in the shooting, as well as a stun gun, from an apartment Mr. James rented in Philadelphia, according to the complaint.

Authorities also searched a storage facility there that Mr. James visited the evening before the attack, the complaint said. They found ammunition there for an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle and a 9 millimeter pistol.

Mr. James had many arrests in his past, officials said, including nine in New York, mostly for misdemeanors, and three in New Jersey.

While investigators identified no clear motive for the attack, Mr. James' postings on social media — including combative videos in recent days on YouTube — came under scrutiny and featured in the complaint.

In one video quoted in the complaint, Mr. James addressed Mr. Adams with grievances about the city subway system: "What are you doing, brother? What's happening with this homeless situation?" He added that every car he boarded was full of homeless people, saying, "It was so bad, I couldn't even stand."

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